

THE  
PLEASURES  
OF  
OLD AGE.

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PLEASURES  
OF  
OLD AGE.

FROM THE FRENCH  
OF  
EMILE SOUVESTRE.  
—

“Softly runs this streamlet ever,  
Waters babble in it never.  
Come, Wanderer, here and rest;  
Come, and let this streamlet teach thee  
Silent goodness is the best.”

RAMLER.

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## INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

EMILE SOUVESTRE.

NIEBUHR says, that “the happiest men are those who have found out what they have to do in this world, and how to do it.” If the saying be true, the author of the following work may be numbered amongst that privileged class.

Gifted with an aptitude of expression and a refined taste, tender-hearted, sympathetic, and imaginative, Emile Souvestre was a romancist from his cradle. While still a boy, nothing delighted him so much as gleaning from the peasantry of his native Brittany legends of the past, and recounting them—or, as often, fairy tales of his own invention—to a youthful audience spell-bound for hours by his fascinating tongue.

Unlike so many romance-writers of his country, Souvestre was filled from an early age with the desire not of amusing only, but of purifying and

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elevating his fellow-creatures. Filled, almost oppressed, with a sense of duty and a love of justice, his whole life appears to have been passed in acts of self-devotion and self-sacrifice. Born in 1806, he passed through the usual college life of a youth of the middle class, and selecting the study of the law in preference to a military career, entered as a student at Rennes. While there, his father died, and shortly afterwards he went to Paris, where he proposed to complete his course of legal studies; but above all to explore for himself that literary world which so irresistibly attracted him, and endeavour to effect an entrance into its charmed circle. Soon after his arrival in Paris, he completed a tragedy, "The Siege of Missolonghi," which was accepted at the principal theatre there, although, from various circumstances, never brought before the public. A series of disappointments, indeed, at this time appears to have weighed heavily on his sensitive nature; but a remedy, though a sharp and bitter one, was at hand; news came of his eldest brother, a merchant-captain, having been lost at sea, with all his property; leaving a wife and child utterly dependent. Emile Souvestre at once decided on the course he ought to pursue; entreating his friends to find him an appointment, no matter how humble, or in what locality, so that he might obtain means to help the bereaved ones, he accepted, without a moment's delay, a situation which offered

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as clerk at a bookseller's at Nantes. The experience gained in this new and tranquil sphere seems greatly to have aided his moral development, by dissipating the dreams of youth, and teaching him to estimate men for their real worth, irrespective of position or intellectual power. But Souvestre, though labouring assiduously in his vocation, was far from neglecting the literary instincts within him. Some poetical and prose productions, published in the local magazines, were the means of introducing him to useful friends ; and he soon found an opportunity of establishing himself as principal of a school. While in this position he married very happily, but lost his wife at the end of the first year. Convinced, however, that in married life alone can the character be fully developed, he found, after a time, another helpmate well suited to his loving disposition. Six years of shifting vocations now passed : by turns barrister, editor, professor, at Brest and Mulhouse, but always pursuing his literary objects, it was in 1836 that his first work appeared in the "*Revue des Deux Mondes*," under the title of "*The Last of the Bretons*." This proved a success, and other works were soon afterwards completed or projected. Souvestre now determined to return to Paris, and devote his whole attention to literature ; not to secure fame or fortune, but a modest competence, if it might be so, and at all hazards to devote his talents to the cause

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of literary purity and social justice. He was not disappointed in his aims; new and successful productions quickly followed each other from his pen, the result of faithful and intelligent labour. Some of these have appeared in English, as “*The Philosopher in the Garret*” and “*The Confessions of a Working Man*. ”

A host of brilliant friends would at this time gladly have welcomed him in the salons of Paris; but his tastes were simple, and his leisure hours were spent in the family circle, which was the happiest world he knew, and the source of many of his most felicitous inspirations; for he believed—to quote one of his own sayings—“that the temple of the muses is not confined to the mountain of the ancients, but is equally to be found at the domestic hearth, between the easy-chair, where the grandfather died, and the cradle where the infant slumbers.”

Ten years passed thus, when the revolution of 1848 gave a new current to men’s thoughts. Pressed by influential friends, Emile Souvestre was induced, on the plea of fulfilling his duty as a citizen of the republic, to become a candidate for the National Assembly, and 46,000 votes testified to the admiration and esteem which his writings had won for him in his native province. This number, however, was insufficient, and a different career of usefulness was proposed for his adoption—that of professor in a government school of employés, and popular lecturer

on history. These public vocations in Paris were, however, suppressed on the change of government; and, while regretting the overthrow of the republic—which, he nevertheless perceived, was ill adapted to the existing state of enlightenment in France—he gladly retired in 1853 to Switzerland, accompanied by his family, to give a course of lectures on the history of literature.

Already known and loved in Switzerland on account of his charming moral productions, Souvestre was welcomed everywhere with friendly enthusiasm. This acknowledgment of his services to healthy literature appears to have afforded him immense satisfaction, and to have given rise to the feeling, that he had at length earned the right to enjoy some leisure and peaceful retirement. But his hopes were not destined to be fulfilled. While still at his post, and before the concluding chapters of this, as it was to prove, his legacy of peace and good will to the world were completed, Emile Souvestre died suddenly in 1854.

Reader, you have then here the last written thoughts, almost the last words, of a large-hearted and pure-minded Frenchman. There is a charm of style and a purity of expression in the original, which I have sought as a labour of love, to convey in the following translation—it is for you to decide with what success.

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I feel sure of one thing, however, that few who begin this simple narration will readily lay it aside until they have reached the last page ; or abstain from offering a frequent tribute of smiles and tears to the life-pictures that are portrayed with so loving a hand in the “Pleasures of Old Age.”\*

THE TRANSLATOR.

*London, July, 1867.*

\* The facts in the above sketch of Emile Souvestre's life, are taken from the “Notice sur la Vie d'Emile Souvestre,” written by his son-in-law, M. Eugène Lesbazeilles, and prefixed to the second edition of the original werk.

THE  
PLEASURES OF OLD AGE.

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CHAPTER I.

THE SOLDIER'S LAST STAGE.

THIS evening, as I returned from my usual walk beside the canal, my eyes wandered musingly over the long line of water sparkling in the sun, and dotted at intervals, between the locks, with heavily laden barges, which crept slowly along among the poplars: my feet moved mechanically, while my imagination revelled amidst a thousand vague and ever-changing images; I was, in short, in a very day-dream, when we seem to live without the consciousness of existence.

Suddenly I heard some one pronounce my name, and, turning round, saw a soldier seated on the grassy bank, who rose up and touched his hat. His haver-

sack was strapped across his shoulders, and the tin case which held his *travelling map* hung at his side. I recognised him at once as being the old schoolmaster's son who had left us five years ago to join the army. He approached me with a frank manly smile on his countenance.

"Can it be Baptiste?" I inquired.

"The same, sir."

"And you are returning home?"

"Yes; with my full discharge."

I congratulated him heartily, and was about to give him tidings of his mother and sisters, but I found that he already knew of their being well and happy.

"Then they are expecting you?"

"Yes, since the morning; but I have come along slowly."

"In consequence of fatigue, no doubt?"

The young soldier shook his head.

"No, indeed, sir; but, on approaching home, one recognises everything. The eye is attracted at every turn by old familiar objects; it is so delightful to recall one's youth. For the last few miles, I may say that there is not a tree or a house on my route which has not had something to tell me."

"I understand you; you felt inclined to greet these old friends of the roadside?"

"Yes, sir; and then recollect the great change that has taken place besides, for I am now returning 'to settle at home,' as our colonel says, and am about to

commence a new life ; on that account, you see, it is well for me to reflect a little. When we reach the last stage, it is time to consider and to look about us."

Having said this, he bowed and continued his journey with the firm bearing and regular step of a soldier.

I was struck by those last few words of his ; there are moments when certain expressions excite within us an audible vibration as it were, the echo of which penetrates to our inmost conscience. Mine long felt the echo of that phrase of Baptiste's—"When we reach the last stage, it is time to reflect and to look about us." And have I not myself reached that last stage? . . . Have I not also received my discharge from the social regiment? . . . Is not my goal a few steps beyond there—that supreme goal which separates the visible world from a world unknown? . . . What else am I but a soldier who has laid aside his arms, and is completing his last day's march previously to arrival at the place of final repose? And yet it seems that I do not trouble myself to examine what passes within or around the circle of my being ; I finish my journey, as I finished my walk just now, at hap-hazard, without a thought about it. I do not select my own path, but follow the first that offers. What strange want of foresight ! marching thus between two worlds, one of which contains all my memories of the past, and the other all my hopes of the future, I neglect to

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stop a moment for reflection ; I do not even bestow a parting glance on the living domicile which I shall have to quit so soon. I neither question myself as to what I have been, nor what I am. What I shall be is God's secret ; and I rely with confidence, in that respect, on His eternal justice. All that passes, therefore, between the Almighty and myself I shall abstain from giving utterance to, because in those intimate confessions of the soul every man must speak for himself to his heavenly Judge.

But what remains to me of life's journey has surely a peculiar claim upon my regard. At the moment of bidding adieu, the traveller fixes his attention upon the objects he is about to quit ; he passes in review the witnesses of his joys or of his sorrows ; he takes leave, one after the other, of each individual and of each object rendered familiar to him by habitual association ; he assembles, so to speak, at that last interview all his heart's companions ; he hears their voices more distinctly, he gazes on their forms more earnestly, he takes possession of them, for the last time, with every sense, in order to carry away a more vivid impression of each. And this exaltation of the faculties takes place not only in regard to all that surrounds him externally, but also to what passes within. He puts a greater restraint upon himself, in order to leave behind and to carry away with him good impressions only ; he strives to discover how best he may augment the tender sweetness of those last moments, with their

poignant regrets, lamentations, tears, or impetuous desires; he speaks with a more caressing tone to the dear ones from whom he is about to part; he opens to their view the obscurest recesses of his heart; he looks for consolation where before he encountered indifference only or dislike; he collects, as it were, with patient resignation the last crumbs of the deserted banquet, just before the dishes are removed.

Well! and why should I not act in a similar manner? Like the traveller, I, too, am on the point of quitting all my associations. Have I not heard the distant rumbling of the sombre chariot which is to bear me to the invisible land? Old age! old age! climax of all things here below—moment of supreme expectation—what shall prevent me from discovering the resources you still possess? The majority of men, indeed, hate or fear you; for they regard you as associated with the dismal cortége of selfishness, of inactivity, of sorrow, and of infirmities. In their eyes, to grow old is to put off life. Ah! let me teach them, on the contrary, that its true character is to perfect it; that old age is the crown of maturity, but a crown of flowers or of thorns, depending upon whether it comes to us as a reward or as a punishment.

Others have written the history of their prosperous years, and of their struggles in the prime of life; I, for my part, will record the impressions of my latter days—record, at this period of decline and of farewell, all that rejoices, consoles, or strengthens me.

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I will, in fact, set down, day by day, for my own edification and for the improvement of those who will come after me :

The occupations of a still active mind, whose labours are now finished ;

The pleasures of an old age unaccompanied by the possession of influence or wealth ;

The consolations of a home, where death has created a solitude.

In short, like the soldier whom I have just met, I desire, henceforth, to complete my last stage looking about me and reflecting.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE CENSUS-TAKER.

SOME one knocks at the door, my servant, Félicité, half opens it, and thrusts in between the wall and the yellow door-panels her broad merry face, which looks like a red poppy amongst the corn.

"If you please, sir—a gentleman—who wishes to see you, sir."

Félicité is one of the best servants in all France or elsewhere, diligent, economical, and trustworthy, but whose vocabulary is remarkable for its paucity of words. All her eloquence is expressed in the laugh or the tears that accompany her unfinished sentences, like the concluding note of a melody which indicates the key.

On this occasion she smiles—a proof that the present visit has nothing in it to alarm me. I tell her to show the visitor in, and she introduces a young man,

who steps leisurely forward, makes a stiff bow, deposits in one corner of the room his umbrella, with his hat perched upon top of it, and then gravely addresses me.

“ I am the district census-taker, sir.”

I should have at once recognised the official in him by his aspect alone. I bow politely, and observe :

“ Very good, sir ; then you are come to take down our names ?”

“ —Ages, professions, and other *particularities*,” continues the municipal officer, pedantically, having in the mean while advanced to the table and spread out on it a large register.

I rise from my chair to hand him the inkstand ; but he draws from the capacious pocket of his overcoat, not only pen and ink both black and red, but pen-knife, ruler, sand-box, and a list of addresses.

I looked at his marvellous pocket, as the hero of Chamisso’s story\* did at that of the devil ; when the census-taker, having found my column and number, commenced his interrogatories.

“ Your name, sir ?”

“ George Raymond.”

“ Born in what year ?”

“ Seventeen hundred and eighty-two.”

The official closes his eyes behind his spectacles, goes through a mental calculation, and murmurs,  
“ Sixty-eight years.”

\* “ Peter Schlemihl, or the Man without a Shadow.”

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"Quite correct," I respond, pensively, "sixty-eight years; and how many changes have I witnessed in that short space of time! How many political and social revolutions which seem to devour each other unceasingly, only to commence anew! The human race has the appearance of revolving perpetually in a circle; only when we regard it from a distant point of view, we perceive that this circle goes on constantly expanding."

"—Married or single?" interrupts the census-taker, evidently a stranger to the philosophy of history.

"A widower, alas!" I answer, while my heart throbs at the word; "a widower for the last five years."

"Formerly a professor of law?"

"Who thinks now only of instructing himself?"

"And proprietor?"

"Of a pension of eighty pounds a year, acquired after forty years' service."

As soon as he had finished his entries, the official took up his ruler, drew two lines across the page in red ink, and asked if I lived alone.

Now comes the turn of Félicité. At his request the poor girl stepped forward; but at each question she became frightened, and after looking at me with a laugh at first, she would, on seeing the official knit his brows, change countenance, and appear almost on the point of crying. Seeing this, I thought it best to put myself in her place and answer for her.

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"Félicité Noirot—thirty-three years old—spinster—domestic servant—and without property."

At the last statement the good creature burst into a laugh, as if it appeared absurd to her to be registered at all. Who indeed, for a moment, could suppose that she possessed anything? Was she not unmistakably one of those whose mission it is to work, and live from day to day only, without any guarantee for the morrow? Who would fail to perceive at a glance that wealth, with all the joys it can purchase, was destined for others; while she had nothing to depend upon but the bounty of men, and the mercy of God? And at this thought, which would have embittered so many other hearts, the gentle creature laughed naïvely, contented with her lot, for the simple reason that it happened to be her lot.

The census-taker drew his red lines a second time across the page, put the ruler, ink, pens, and register methodically into his pocket, resumed his umbrella and the hat he had deposited on it, and, after making a bow less stately than when he entered, took his departure.

Alas! how everything degenerates; yet here, by virtue of his office, was the successor of Cato the famous Censor!

Directly after he left us, Félicité wanted to know why the gentleman was so inquisitive. I tried to make her understand the necessity of a general census;

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but after my first few words of explanation, the poor girl grew inattentive, her hand instinctively sought for the corner of her apron ; she had caught sight of a line of dust left by her brush on one of my drawings. I was obliged to conclude my remarks, and leave her to her special vocation.

Formerly I should have been offended at this vulgar instinct—I should have asked if a being, so wholly devoted to the trivialities of life, were really one of my own species ; but experience has taught me humility, and on such occasions I call to mind the dialogue of the crown and the sandal :

“ Recollect that we are sisters, and serve the same master,” said the sandal to her companion. “ I, thy sister ?” exclaimed the offended crown ; “ what then are you doing down there in the mud and dust ?” “ Do you not see, sister,” replied the sandal, “ I help to support you up above in the pure air and the sunshine ?”

And can you not with equal propriety make us the same reply, humble workers, who undertake as your vocation the rough labours of the world, in order to give us the necessary leisure for more refined and intellectual occupations ? Are you not indeed the feet of that society, the hands of which treat you with contempt ? Cursed then be the human pride, which apportions out its esteem for the kind of work, and not for the devotion of the worker—which refuses equal

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respect for an equal fulfilment of duty—which has thrust the modest and the useful under the feet of the brilliant or the superfluous ; despising the labourer to whose exertions we owe the harvests which support life, while glorifying the artist who succeeds in depicting them for the gratification of the eye only.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE NOBLEST MONUMENT.

**A**T the end of one of the suburbs of the town, on the right-hand side, stands a portico, supported by two columns, and furnished with iron gates. On the entablature of the portico is inscribed a verse from the Holy Scriptures. This is the entrance to the cemetery.

Whenever my heart is oppressed by sorrow, I go there, and, approaching a grey stone shaded by a weeping willow, give vent to my grief. The grave lying beneath is small, but a vacant space has been reserved beside it (a place I am one day to occupy). The epitaph is comprised in two lines, and contains only the name of the departed one who has gone before me, with three dates—that of her birth, of our marriage, and of our earthly separation. Up to within a short period it had been my intention to raise a more imposing monument; during many months I

dreamed of the combined structure of bronze and marble to be erected beneath those waving branches. No longer able to exhibit, in this state of existence, any marks of devotion to her who reposes there, I indulged in the idea of proving thus at least my faithful remembrance of her. How many calculations were completed and recommenced with this object in view ! what efforts were made to increase my savings month by month ! what satisfaction I derived from wearing coarser garments, and the further saving effected by a more frugal table ! At length the necessary sum was obtained. I went every day to the cemetery to measure our funereal couch, and erect in thought the cherished monument. One morning, as I was there mentally realising its form, two little girls passed me ; they were carrying a half-filled watering-pot ; beads of perspiration trickled down their heated foreheads, and both panted for breath.

“ Where are you going so fast, my poor children ? ” I asked.

“ Down there,” they replied, “ to our father’s grave, which we have planted with flowers.”

“ And you are carrying that water to refresh them ? ”

“ Yes, sir, we are obliged to bring it from the well a long way off, at the end of the walk. In a short time the well will dry up, and then our flowers must die.”

They said this so piteously that I strove to comfort them by pointing out the flower-beds which flourished amidst the graves around.

"Oh yes, sir!" they exclaimed; "the gravedigger is well paid to keep those flowers watered; they belong to rich people; but look yonder at the others!"

They then showed me a corner of the cemetery which I had never visited, with long rows of graves already burnt up by the sun, where the flowers appeared to be nothing better than yellow and faded leaves.

"That is how our father's grave will look in a few days," said the elder of the two children, with emotion.

"So, then, without a supply of water, you must give up all idea of keeping it green and fresh?"

"Yes, indeed, sir. Poor people are very unfortunate not to be able to keep the flowers alive round the graves of their relations."

The elder, who said this, sighed, and then, beckoning to her sister, they both took up their watering-pot and went on. I followed them with my eyes for a long while.

"Dear and pious children, who crave only the means of ornamenting, with a few flowers, the grave of him whom they weep for! And how many others, doubtless, long for the same source of consolation! Whilst I am contemplating a stately monument to my departed wife, how many, less favoured, would be satis-

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fied with a shrub or a few roses at the foot of the wooden cross which surmounts their cherished dead ! With the price of the costly materials I might cause enough moisture to flow from the soil to refresh every one of these faded graves. The sacrifice of my vain caprice would be a source of joy to all. Farewell, then, useless monument which I had fondly dreamed of constructing in bronze and marble to the memory of my beloved Louise ; in its place I will raise for her one of self-sacrifice and of true devotion. What these humble graves stand in need of I will bestow in the name of her who was the better part of myself ; the water which they all thirst for shall gush forth from the foot of her grave ; though dead, she shall still be what she was when living—a source of material aid to those in want, and of consolation to those in sorrow.”

God be praised for having afforded me the means of honouring her memory in a manner worthy of herself ! To-day the spring has been found, and its waters murmur softly as they flow beside the trees of the cemetery, bedewing the graves of the poor equally with those of the more opulent.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE ANNIVERSARY.

THIS morning, on entering the little room which serves me for a parlour and a place of repose (for I must no longer call it of occupation), I saw a wreath of *immortelles* laid on the desk, underneath the portrait which is covered with black crape. Félicité, who had just placed it there, hurried away at my approach. She, too, kind soul, has a faithful memory ; she has not forgotten that this is the anniversary of that mournful day when God took from me the most valued, the most cherished possession He had bestowed upon me—the wife of my bosom, the partner of my joys and sorrows—who for thirty years had made it her constant endeavour to bear the heavier portion of our mutual life's burden.

Entering my home in the early bloom of her youth, she had shared with me everything—illusions, disappointed hopes, toilsome struggles, and persistent

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industry. To her I have been indebted for my sweetest joys in the day of triumph, my most efficacious consolation in the darkest trials ; she was the light of the house, of which I strove to be the pillar. Our two souls, so long commingled, had ended by becoming one ; she gave constant expression in words to my passing thoughts, she proposed what I was on the point of wishing for ; when one felt ready to sink, the other was ever present to sustain. Each had thus a twofold courage and a twofold conscience. Her ever-watchful economy had enabled her to extract comfort out of poverty ; like Janus of old, she seemed to have two faces—one which looked into the future, whilst the other ceased not to regard the past.

Thanks to her, our children had grown up and married, and we found ourselves alone together in our declining years ; but her tenderness had filled up every vacant place at the fireside. Relieved from the imperative duties of the mother, she had suffered'd as it were the recollections of her youth to spring up afresh. Her now renewed leisure had brought back the old familiar chat of our earlier years, the short walks taken for ourselves alone, the readings aloud ; all those sweet habits indulged in at the commencement of married life, soon destined to be interrupted by family duties, these we had again found in the second spring-time of our existence.

May I venture to say it ? these days had been the most delightful of my life. I breathed an atmo-

sphere filled at once with the last perfume of youth, and the sense of security which is produced by a career fully accomplished. We felt, at length, that contentment of heart which results from the combined experience of the ideal and the realities of life—that serenity which is sought in vain during the fever of action—and that disinterested appreciation of life which enables us to enjoy it, because we ask for no more than it can yield. A state of happiness, alas ! too short lived. She, who had shared all my contests in life, had ever concealed her own wounds. I had seen her form gradually decline, almost without taking account of it. At each new symptom of failing health, her courage gained strength ; she hid her pallor under smiles. More attentive to her person, as time and suffering redoubled their attacks, she nourished my illusion by diverting my thoughts from all causes for grief on her account, and strove to spare me the bitter pang of anticipating an infinite sorrow.

I felt a vague suspicion of this only, on seeing her day by day more occupied with heavenly thoughts and with me. In her ever increasing tenderness I had a presentiment of approaching separation. At length the danger became evident. Exhausted by her efforts, the invalid could no longer quit her couch, from which the daylight was now almost constantly excluded. Her last days were occupied in preparing me for the inevitable blow ; but I could not bring my

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mind to comprehend it, I could not believe in its possibility, while she strove to make me resigned to it as near at hand, and to soften its approach.

Time had imperceptibly created a solitude around us. Our children were no longer near us, and had too many ties elsewhere to return; our old friends were dispersed, save one who lived a few doors from our own, the dearest of all, one who during thirty years had been present at our troubles without increasing them, at our joys without casting on them a shadow. One day, however (a day sadly to be remembered), a cloud had suddenly appeared in the horizon, and burst into a storm; the long familiar connexion of years was rudely broken, and a feeling of false shame had prevented either side from making the first advance towards reconciliation. When my dying Louise felt her last hour approaching, she wrote to Roger, with a hand already clammy with death, these few words, “Come and console the solitude of your friend!”

Roger felt the force of the appeal, and hastened to her bedside. Sweet though cruel return! She joined our two hands, and confided each of us to the other, then beckoning to our friend, she spoke to him a long while in a low weak tone; no doubt she was leaving me as a legacy to his care, for Roger repeated, with scarcely any intermission, “I promise it, I promise it!” while his tears fell upon her pillow; mine flowed at the foot of her bed, where I had buried my face in my hands, bereft even of hope.

Two days and two nights passed ; when the sun next rose, its rays were to shine on the sufferer for the last time. Her eyelids, which trembled beneath the glare, closed ; she murmured my name, whispered the first words of the prayer of the humble, "Our Father, who art in heaven," then, while supported in my arms, she calmly sank into her last sleep.

Henceforth I was alone ; for I felt that on earth there was no longer a heart ever ready to beat in response to all the throbings of my own, nowhere an intellect to answer all the questionings of mine. She was gone—the devoted companion of all my trials, the friend who knew how to shield me from the rain and screen me from the sun. Hitherto I had been under her protection, she under mine ; each of us had no other occupation than to think of the other ; now I was under the sad necessity of being the centre of my own thoughts.

Oh ! who can describe the mournful change of a home at the hour of a widower's bereavement ? It is felt more especially when the first despair subsides, when self-possession has returned, and one can look round and comprehend all that has happened. It is felt when the footsteps awaken mournful echoes in the lonely chamber, when the eye encounters at each moment some souvenir of her who has gone ; here her work-basket, containing some half-finished garment ; there her book, still open at the favourite page ; a little further on the dress, still retaining its folds and recalling her attitude ; everywhere things she has

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looked on and handled. Her memory floats around you, impressed on every piece of furniture, on every wall ; it seems as if she were but gone out for a few hours, and that she must return. At each footfall you raise the head ; every time the door is opened you turn round, as if she were about to appear. You cannot believe in the eternity of that absence, while everything has been left in its place as if for a speedy return. It is long, indeed, before this conviction can penetrate to the soul, before you can realise how irrevocable is that departure.

Then it is that the last spark of courage dies out, that you cower down in your grief without other occupation than grief itself. Oh ! how the tender reminiscences transform themselves into so many tortures ! With what terrible persistence we reckon up, coin by coin, the treasure lost ! How we mourn over the lost days, the transient quarrels ! What remorse we feel at ever having afflicted one to whom we can no longer give joy ! Ah, why does not the thought of separation strike us in the dark hours when our patience gives way, and our consideration for those around us fails ? Why, at the moment of exciting a tear, do we not say to ourselves, “ I am depriving of happiness a moment which will return no more, I am striking a victim condemned to death.”

These thoughts have recurred to me more vividly

to-day before the garland of *immortelles* and the veiled portrait.

The crape which covers the picture I placed there myself, lest in having the image of the absent one every hour of the day before me I should grow accustomed to disregard it. I could not bear that that cherished face should be confounded with the surrounding objects, or become a trivial ornament of the domestic hearth, and lose by force of habit its enduring charm. I have reserved it rather for moments when my heart yearns towards her, and longs for her presence. This portrait helps me then to recall the past. Beneath the gentle glance of her eyes, my memory takes wing; it mounts beyond the separation and the declining years, far, far back towards the radiant spring-time of our lives.

To-day my hand has removed the sombre veil; I behold her again, that image of a soul which I alone have fathomed; I see her once more as I knew her in the vigorous years of her prime, when all the blossoms of youth had ripened into fruit. While she lived, I was less observant of the distinctive points of that beloved form; possessed of herself, I cared less to examine the casket; but now I study its minutest details, and strive to fix them so deeply in my memory that the cherished image may never quit me, but float, as it were, ever at my side.

I gazed a long while this morning at the portrait,

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which looks down on me with a smile, and, amidst my tears, addressed it thus :

“ Blessings on thee, beloved one, for all the happiness which I owe to thee, and for all the wrongs which thou hast pardoned ! When alive, thou wert the guiding-star of our home ; departed, thou art now its guardian angel ! All the peace, consolation, and abundance that I find there, it is to thee I chiefly owe them. Thy foresight survives in the established spirit of order, in the devotedness of the domestics, and in all those habits which go to form the atmosphere of home. Thou art gone, like the sun, who leaves the seeds, warmed by his soft rays, to germinate during the humid shadows of night. All the cherished projects of thy heart have continued to flourish, though thou art no longer here to give effect to them. I find thy presence again in everything that lightens my solitude—the refined simplicity of my abode, the well-ordered frugality of my table, the grateful kindness of our neighbours, the respect of all, and the return of our old friend Roger—nothing but what is thine, which comes not through thee. Blessings, then, on thee a thousand-fold, O my gentle guardian angel ! and may I prove to thee my gratitude by making others share in all that thou hast done for me !”

## CHAPTER V.

*THE OLD FRIEND.*

**R**OGER arrived to-day earlier than usual ; he, too, recollected the mournful anniversary. He came to take me out for a walk, "wishing," as he said, "to divert my thoughts." I have never been able to make him understand that the recollection of Louise is my best consolation, and that to weep for her assuages my grief.

Roger, too, is a widower, but his state bears not the least resemblance to mine. Married to a woman who compromised his name, and opposed all his tastes, he only began life, as it were, when left a widower ; hence he has schooled himself never to look back ; his happiness and his good feeling alike have induced him to forget.

But his long trial deadened neither his zeal nor the goodness of his heart ; everything which can benefit mankind interests him. The arts, literature, science, to

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none is he indifferent, nothing appears averse to him. Wherever the human mind makes an effort, Roger hastens there, encouraging and aiding according to his powers.

Just now he returned to me, bringing twenty little bottles for a new experiment in photography, and scolding his servant for carrying a package so carelessly, which he had just received from the railway porter. Réné, with the assistance of Félicité, set his burden down at the kitchen door, and excused himself in consequence of its being so heavy.

“ Heavy !” cried Roger, almost angrily ; “ you find it heavy because you take no interest in the progress of mankind. You do not reflect, you lazy fellow, that that box contains the analysed specimens of our two new veins of tin and copper ore, which are certain to revolutionise the industrial occupation of the district and enrich it for ever. If I were as young as you, I would carry that box next my heart, and as tenderly as a new-born babe. What if it should contain one—eh ?”

“ You are turned mineralogist now, then,” said I, smiling.

“ And why not ?” he answered ; “ have you forgotten your Terence,

*Homo sum, nihil humani a me alienum puto?\*\**

and as he saw I smiled :

\* I am a man, and think nothing of human interest alien to me.

"I know, I know," he continued, snapping his fingers above his head, as he always does when determined on a particular course, "people call me a meddlesome fellow, an old woman, who is always discovering dishes made by others and for others; but what do I care? If I do not assist in drawing the triumphal car as it advances, at least I run behind it, shouting bravo at the procession and the leaders. It is not every one, friend Raymond, who has the gift of genius; great men and great ideas must have their public to comprehend them, if possible, but, at all events, to applaud. I am one of that public; but do you think that it is better passively to observe the progress of society, like a procession, from a window hired for the purpose?"

"No, indeed," I replied, "and far from laughing at you, I admire you."

"Envy me, rather," cried he, "for it gives me occupation and delight. Whilst others retire for life into flannel and nightcaps, like mummies in their wrappings, I mingle in everything stirring, I grow young again by contact with everything that buds and blossoms beneath the sun. The world is an immense laboratory wherein some new surprise is daily prepared for me. Humanity itself seems to labour for my amusement and occupation; it is but a small return, on my part, then, to take an interest in all that contributes to its profit, and to illuminate my windows at each of its victories. . . . By-the-by, have you

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heard that a new motive power has been discovered more powerful and more economical than steam ? I have written for information on the subject. But forgive me, for I am an old fool, to think only of my own affairs when I ought to occupy myself with you.”

And he took both my hands in his, and began to question me with the deepest sympathy ; seeing my eyes moistened with tears, he became silent for a while and then proposed a walk. I agreed.

We reached an elevated spot, which overlooks the town, and sat down under an old maple-tree in which the bullfinches were singing.

There Roger, as usual, employed all his ingenuity to divert my thoughts. He talked to me of science, art, political economy, and philosophy ; he described to me the golden rays which he perceived dawning from every point of the world’s horizon ; for Roger is a Utopian philosopher, and the imagination, which he has failed to spread over his own existence, he diffuses over humanity itself. He realises to-day on its account the dreams of his youth.

I followed him insensibly into the splendid vistas which his enthusiasm created for the future, and taking his hand :

“ Continue to cherish,” said I to him, “ this ardour and these hopes ; grow young again yourself in the eternally recurring spring-time of the human race,

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for it is the surest means of escaping from the tedium of old age."

"The tedium!" exclaimed Roger; "do you venture so far, then, as to calumniate old age? Learn that I regard it as the happiest time of my life."

And, as I shook my head,

"Yes, the very happiest," he repeated, striking the ground with his stick, "the happiest both from a physical and a moral point of view."

"You forget the infirmities which accompany it."

"And you, my dear Raymond, do not think of the passions which it leaves behind. What more cruel infirmity than ambition, which keeps us day and night panting up that slippery path of success; than love, which makes slaves of us; than hatred, which turns us into tyrants; than idleness, which whispers into one ear, 'Rest and sleep,' while necessity cries into the other, 'Awake and be doing!'"

"But the diminution of our powers?"

"Is compensated by the lessening of our obligations."

"So, then, you are delighted at having lost your hair?"

"I have a wig which keeps me warmer."

"To feel your sight growing weak?"

"With my spectacles, I can see as well as at fifteen."

"And to have lost all your teeth?"

"Zounds! they caused me suffering enough; now I have false ones, which save me from leeches."

I could not help laughing.

"You think I am joking!" exclaimed Roger, impatiently, "but I am not, upon my honour. Mankind are unjust towards old age; they expect from it the resources of another period of life, instead of using those which are really its own. The essence of the human soul is regret; in order for anything to please us, we must have lost it. In youth we weep for childhood; in manhood, for youth; in old age, for our departed vigour; and because old age is the final step, we have not the opportunity to regret that."

"So that you regard the sort of opprobrium which clings to old age as an injustice?"

"As a common-place, rather. Be on your guard, my dear Raymond, for common-place rules the world. It is sufficient for a piece of stupidity to be repeated from father to son, to escape from all examination; it enters, in fact, into the domain of truth. Error would appear to resemble wine; if once bottled up in an axiom, it is held to improve with time: the oldest errors are the most esteemed. People have affixed to certain words fatal epithets, which brand them at once with an indelible stigma. Mourful old age! . . . Happy infancy! . . . Joyous college days! Why, they are so many absurdities and falsehoods."

"What, do you not like to recall your early years?"

"Oh, certainly; just as I like to call to mind the storm which tossed me about for three days when I went on a visit to England; or as I like to think of my broken leg, and of my great lawsuit. We are pleased at the recollection of our painful trials, if only to remember our escape from them; but may Heaven forgive me if I ever regret our classical prison at Verrières! By-the-by, friend Raymond, you know that Monday next is St. Nicholas-day. We dine together with our old schoolfellows on that occasion. Alas! the ranks are thinning: each year death removes a plate. We shall only number five this time."

"But be happy in meeting each other again, and talking over our college life."

"Good Heavens! do you think old galley-slaves meet to talk over their mutual captivity?"

"Your experience as a student must have left you very unpleasant souvenirs."

"You call that life!" cried Roger; "why, I call it only an apprenticeship; or, in other words, a mixture of all that is most difficult, wearisome, and repulsive."

"And yet most indispensable."

"Did I assert anything to the contrary? Do you think that I want to burn down our colleges, like the citizen of Aristophanes' play, in the school of Socrates?

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No ; upon my soul, I esteem, I venerate them ; but I may, at any rate, be allowed to thank Heaven that I have finished my terms. Letellier's Grammar is a very useful work ; Boudet's Dictionary a most admirable book of reference. I do not refuse a certain amount of commendation for the *Gradus ad Parnassum*, and Lancelot's Greek poets have a deep claim on my gratitude. I will even praise, if you desire it, the long rigmaroles of our old senior professor, the recitations at the Easter holidays, our walks, two and two, along the fields carpeted with flowers, and gay with butterflies. All this was proper and necessary at the time, only you must not be offended if I prefer the liberty I enjoy to-day. Let others adore what they no longer possess ; as for me, I prefer what I have. Old age has a charm in my eyes, because he has brought me the independence which is the reward of labour, together with the experience which teaches me how to enjoy it,—the moderation which economises our pleasures,—and the leisure which enables us to appreciate them. Let the world chant in doleful chorus its regret for the years of youth ; I, for my part, will not cease to laud the pleasures of old age.”

## CHAPTER VI.

*AN OLD MAN'S AMUSEMENTS.*

**F**OR some time past friend Roger has complained of his servant Réné: the fellow's mind is no longer in his work: his master finds him always with pen in hand scribbling page after page, which he hides or tears up on being discovered.

"Heaven help us!" said Roger to me this morning, "I do believe the unhappy fellow is turning literary; he is no longer good for anything; his eyes are for ever fixed on the ceiling as if he were looking there for an idea, while the spiders are weaving cob-webs in the corners of the room at their leisure. When I ask him to bring me my cup of chocolate, he presents me with a boot-jack. We are just like two people speaking different languages, wholly unable to understand each other."

These complaints of Roger turned my thoughts to the conduct of Félicité, always so regular and

attentive. Thanks to Félicité, the comforts to which the provident mistress of the house had accustomed me, have not ceased for a single instant to surround me. Inheritress of a tradition of order and of devotion, she has scrupulously adhered to it. The spirit of the dead seems still to preside over everything in the household, and to whisper into the ear of the faithful servant its mysterious orders.

Thinking that Réné, who often comes over to us, could not have a better example and a better counsellor, I spoke to this excellent woman of the change which had taken place in him, and besought her, if possible, to learn the cause, and give him some good advice on the subject. But, to my great surprise, Félicité would not believe in Réné's faults at all. Contrary to her usual nature, she found words enough to defend him.

"Mr. Roger was too hasty, . . . he gave three orders at once, without allowing time for their being carried out. . . . There was no regularity in the house, and every day there was some new duty to be performed. . . . Last year Réné was occupied the greater part of his time in sticking flies on cardboard; now he was employed on nothing but polishing little stones for his master's collection." She continued in this manner, becoming more excited every moment. Never had I heard her utter so many and such long sentences in succession. I was obliged to interrupt her by renewing my request that she would give some

cautionary advice to Réné. At length she promised to do so, though with evident repugnance.

"Masters," she said in concluding, "are not just towards their servants."

I looked at her with surprise, and she added, in a subdued tone,

"At least I do not mean that as regards you, sir."

But she imagines it in the case of others. So then this simple creature, who knew only how to laugh or shed tears, begins also to criticise. The tendency of the age has penetrated even to the kitchen of Félicité.

I soon forgot this little incident, however, after I had seated myself at the window to observe the passers-by. This, to me, is one of the most charming amusements of old age. The crowd which glides before my eyes awakens in me endless memories, and inspires innumerable fancies and sympathies. Sometimes it is a resemblance that strikes me, and brings back a whole poem of my youth; sometimes there are contrasts which fill me with profound and sombre thoughts; or again, it is an expression of the features, a word caught, a significant movement of the body, which suggests to my mind a rapid romance, the characters of which disappear almost instantaneously, leaving my imagination to trace out the dénouement.

Leaning over my balcony, I am like a spectator in the back seats at a pantomime, to whom the plot has

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not been revealed ; my theatre is the world, my actors are men, my play is human life itself.

There is not one of those passers-by who has not some hidden joy or sorrow, the reflexion of which is dimly visible in his countenance ; some secret passion, which he strives to bury in the folds of his cloak. The theatre is nothing more than a conventional though exaggerated revelation of characters and sentiments, which exhibit themselves every day before our eyes, without our condescending to notice them. Every human being and every experience is comprised in the celebrated interview of Napoleon and Pius VII. The Emperor, who desired to be crowned by the Roman Pontiff, at first assumes an air of respect and piety.

“*Comedian!*” murmurs the Pope.

Afterwards, the hero becomes enraged—storms—threatens.

“*Tragedian!*” cries the old man.

Alas ! these two words are applicable to every living man. Youth and mature age waver equally between tragedy and comedy ; peace just comes to us in the latter days, when the curtain is about to fall.

Dark clouds driven by the south wind approach. It begins to rain ; the people are hurrying to their houses. This is the interlude in the representation which I was following with so much interest. I shut down my window and turn to my writing-desk.

An atlas lies open upon it; I sit down, and begin to turn over the leaves.

The amusement is here of a different kind. Just before I was at the theatre, now I am on my travels.

In order to perceive all that an atlas contains, it is necessary to have wandered through some beautiful country, with no other object in view than that of observing and feeling. The impressions thus gained are fixed, though without order, like the leaves of a book irregularly sewn together. Take up now a map on which are traced the outlines of the country you have visited, the situation of each town, the longitudes and the distances ; the chaos of impressions falls at once into order, you begin to read from your memory without confusion, errors, or forgetfulness. And where others perceive only coloured lines, you see the wonders reappear which formerly so attracted your attention. Just here, for instance, where the marks appear confused, rise the Alps, crowned with their coronets of snow. That dark spot there melts into a lake, reflecting as in a magic mirror all the changes of the sky ; farther on, these meandering lines transform themselves into mighty rivers, into mysterious forests, or long valleys, which disappear beneath the overhanging mountains ; farther on again, those radiating lines beyond which all is blank, there is the sea, with its waves and foaming billows, its boundless horizon, and its pulsations listened to by both worlds.

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There is scarcely a single point or a name in the whole map which does not recall to mind some terrible or delightful impression.

But the journeyman who engraved these confused and intermingled lines did not for an instant suspect the fairy power which his work possessed ! As for myself, I regarded these hieroglyphics for a long time with as much indifference as I did those on the Egyptian obelisks in the Museum ; maps seemed to me very like the result of a spider crawling with inky feet over some manuscripts containing geographical names. Time alone has given a meaning to the riddle, and raised the veil which hid from me a thousand panoramas.

To a schoolboy an atlas is only a book for the class ; to an old man it is a magic lantern.

## CHAPTER VII.

## RENE AND FELICITE.

THE day declines, the air grows chilly. I began to think just now of having a fire, and rang the bell for Félicité, but in vain. I was obliged to go out myself and look for her. She was standing at the front door with Réné. It occurred to me at first that she was giving him advice, but as I drew nearer I found it was Réné who was speaking, while Félicité listened with an air of embarrassment. Are the parts, then, so suddenly changed, and is it the preacher herself who is being sermonised ?

I could not satisfy myself on this point, for at the sound of my footsteps Réné suddenly stopped. Félicité came towards me, and I sent her in to light the fire.

The attitude of Roger's valet struck me as singular. His face was very red, and he held his hat in his hand, staring into the crown as if in search of some bright

idea dropped there from his brain, and for the moment lost sight of. When I asked him how his master was, he answered me in a confused manner, and quickly broke off the interview, on the pretext of going to fetch a basket he had left behind in the kitchen.

I returned to the parlour; but on passing I caught a glance of the kitchen through the side window. Réné was standing before the little basket which contained the knitting treasures of Félicité; he looked behind him, and then I saw him thrust a letter into an unfinished stocking, and hurry away like a schoolboy caught stealing apples.

As soon as the noise of the street door closing satisfied me that he was gone, I entered the kitchen, took possession of the mysterious letter, and returned into the parlour. Félicité had just lit the fire. I gravely handed her the letter.

“Here is a letter for you, Félicité.”

She looked at me with an air of bewilderment.

“A letter, sir . . . whom does it come from?”

“From your work-basket.”

She opened her eyes still wider.

“Gracious Heavens! from whom, then, can it come, sir?”

“You will be able to tell me that when you have read it.”

“If, sir, you will be so kind as to read it for me . . . I can hardly see, except to . . .”

I did not wait to be asked a second time, and broke the seal at once.

The letter was written on a sheet of paper embellished with coloured vignettes: roses, pansies, and everlastings encircled the manuscript in a symbolic garland. The writing was in rose-coloured ink, and adorned at the beginning of each line with a capital letter in flourishes, which put one in mind of those of a drum-major at the head of his regiment.

Félicité bent her head over my arm to look at the ornamented epistle, and could not restrain a cry of admiration.

"Oh! sir, is it possible what is written on that beautiful paper can be meant for me? . . . See what nosegays! It is like the letter of a prince . . . or of a member of Parliament."

"Princes receive bouquets, my good girl, but do not give them, and members of Parliament keep their flowers to adorn their speeches."

"But who can have written to me in that beautiful manner?"

"Listen."

And I began to read aloud, without heeding the places where the writer, like the servant in the "Femmes Savantes" of Molière, had broken Priscian's head.

"MISS FELICITE,—This is to inform you of the sentiments of which I feel honoured to be filled in

regard of you, and which not daring to tell you by word of mouth, I have written this with my pen with the hope that this letter will not give offence.

“ Other parties would have told you, I dare say, that they thought you better than Venus, or some other great lady. I will be content to tell you frankly that I love you just as you are, and that if I have the pleasure to obtain you for a wife, I should have nothing else to ask Heaven for, and that I could die in peace.

“ This is why I come to ask you downright if you will do me this favour. I am thirty-eight years old. I have four hundred and fifty-six francs in the savings-bank, and all my certificates are in order, including that of the doctor who vaccinated me. I have the offer of a little shop, which I will buy, if you are agreeable to the affair.

“ Be so good, then, as to reply to me as soon as possible, for I cannot wait any longer. Every time that I see you in your kitchen I feel as if I were on the gridiron, all for love of you. Such is my nature. Nevertheless, I will call for your answer to-morrow if master sends me out for anything, and I hope once more, Miss Félicité, that you will not refuse to become mine. With which I have the honour to be,

“ Your respectful and devoted lover,  
“ RENE LERVIEUX.”

During the reading of this singular epistle Félicité

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did nothing but utter interjections and cries of admiration, or break out into fits of laughter ; but on reaching the name at the end she suddenly became silent. I raised her head ; she was blushing, and her eyes were bright as stars.

“ Good Heavens ! it is from him ! ” she exclaimed, in troubled accents. “ You are sure, sir, you have read aright—it is really from Réné ? ”

“ See for yourself.”

I showed her the letter ; she pretended to be spelling out the name, as if to be more certain, while tears filled her eyes.

“ Are you annoyed at the request ? ” I asked.

“ Oh no, sir—quite the contrary ! ”

“ It seems then, in fact, that Réné and you understand each other ? ”

“ Perhaps so, sir ; but it was without knowing it. Poor dear man ! . . . He only told me he was tired of being alone. . . . ”

The recollection of this increased her emotion ; she pretended to arrange the chairs at the other end of the parlour ; but I saw her wiping her eyes. Such an avowal was too clear for any one to be deceived.

So the silly creature has suffered herself to fall in love with this good-for-nothing fellow ; and she will no doubt accept his offer, and abandon me, to set up housekeeping for herself.

At this thought, I could no longer control a feeling of disappointment and impatience. I sud-

denly threw down on the fender the tongs I held in my hand.

“ Listen !” I cried. “ I must know, Félicité, how matters stand. If you are happy, why do you weep ?”

“ True, sir . . . very true,” she replied, trying to arrest a final tear. “ It is very stupid . . . but there, it is over now.”

She wiped her eyes with her apron, and looked at me smiling. That smile irritated me still more than her tears.

“ Then it is all agreed on—in fact, settled ?” I said, rising. “ You will quit me to marry Réné ?”

She gave a start, and lifted her head :

“ Oh dear ! dear !” she cried ; “ I never thought of that !”

“ But you should have thought of it,” I continued, with some asperity. “ You do not suppose that I am rich enough to keep a female servant and a valet de chambre ? Besides, does not Réné say that he wants to set up a shop ?”

“ Yes, sir ; I see it now.”

“ And do you see also the end of this shop-keeping, with the insufficiency of your means to make it answer, and through what misery and privations you will, step by step, reach beggary ?”

“ Merciful Heavens ! who told you that, sir ?”

“ Experience. Only look at what has become of all the poor girls you knew who were determined to

renounce the comfort and the security they enjoyed in service to venture upon the uncertainties of marriage ! Let me remind you, first, of Marguerite over the way, deserted by her husband . . . ”

She interrupted me with vehemence :

“ Ah ! but Réné is an honest man, that he is !”

“ Be it so. Look, then, at the little woman at the draper’s shop round the corner, who has no fault to find with her husband, but who cannot support her six children.”

“ And such beautiful children as they are, too !” exclaimed Félicité, with emotion ; “ so good and affectionate, that, as she said only yesterday to me, she would not give up even the least cherished one for the crown of France !”

“ Ah ! but some day or the other she will give them up for nothing at all to the workhouse !” I replied, sarcastically, “ for that is the usual lot of such wretched beings, brought into the world only to suffer. The workhouse or the prison—in other words, misery or vice . . . if, indeed, it be not both combined !”

And, in order the better to convince her, I summoned statistics to my aid. I enlarged upon the fact of the lower class extending itself and growing more and more malignant, like a social cancer. I took the utmost pains to bring down to the level of her understanding the principal arguments of Malthus. I pictured her to herself as the Eve of an accursed race, who had no seat provided for them at the social banquet !

The poor girl understood not a word of my harangue, unless it was that I disapproved of her marriage with Réné ; and she began to sob. Her distress, I must admit, excited my pity ; and I consoled her as well as I was able, telling her we would talk the matter over again on the morrow.

This morning I summoned Félicité to resume the subject of yesterday. Her face was red, her eyelids swollen, and her cheeks mottled with tears ; but her features expressed a sort of feverish resolution. I asked her if she had reflected. She answered at once that there was nothing more to reflect about, as she was determined to marry Réné. And as I was about to renew my objections of last night, she interrupted me by saying :

“ No doubt, sir, you must be right ; but I have none the less confidence in the goodness of God. He cannot have forbidden poor people to be happy ; and, as for that, they have at least the right to fall in love.”

“ And who will guarantee your future prospects ? ” I asked. “ Others have family connexions, a position in life, or sufficient savings ; but as for you ? . . . ? ”

“ Well, we shall have Providence to help us ! ” she exclaimed, clasping her hands with fervour.

Under any other circumstances I should have been touched by this pious confidence ; but now I only saw in it the subterfuge of a passion, which sought to

excuse itself by putting its imprudence under the protection of God. There was in the tone, the manner, the very attitude of Félicité an appearance of obstinacy which I had never observed in her before. She was evidently disposed beforehand to repel every objection ; she would not even listen to any : her own will was to be her law.

Accustomed to her submission, I was hurt at this sudden revolt. There seemed to me to be something like ingratitude in this readiness to break the link which had, in a manner, united us during fifteen years. I said to myself, bitterly, that our servants—even the most devoted and faithful—care only for the daily bread and the shelter secured to them beneath our roofs. By means of good treatment and confidence we fancy that we make them take root in our families, and attach them as humble friends to our destinies. Vain delusion ! At the first opportunity the slave in disguise breaks his chain. Nothing can blend his fate with ours ; nothing attaches him. We may strive to make him a leaf of the great family tree ; he is only a bird resting in its branches, and flies away with the first rays of the sun.

These thoughts increased my vexation, and I dismissed Félicité, coldly telling her that she was at liberty to go, and that I should take steps to procure another servant. The poor girl, greatly moved, was anxious to reply, to excuse herself ; but words failed

her ; she gave me an imploring look, as if begging me to divine her feelings and give utterance to her thoughts. But I retained my haughty manner, and she was forced to retire without an explanation.

Left alone, I began walking up and down the room while continuing my diatribe against domestics.

And with regard to the monologue so often criticised in dramatic productions, I will just observe here that it is the most frequent and the most natural of all forms of conversation. Where, indeed, shall we find an interrogator so intimately known, so discreet, so conciliatory, or of better taste, than one's self ? Who else can so readily suggest one thought responsive to another, without the intervention of words ; or speak without obscurity, and reply without passion ? The monologue is a perpetual triumph of oratory, a feast which one serves up with one's own hands, and where everything is in harmony. Lucullus supping with Lucullus.

I continued, therefore, my quiet recriminations with the increasing approbation of the audience within ; arguments arose at my summons like soldiers falling into their ranks, and being drawn up in order of battle.

At the head marched the grand arguments commanded by prudence, and destined to attack all marriages contracted without proper provision in reserve. Then came the artillery of forebodings, such as periods

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of stagnation, increase of family, sickness ; and finally the light troops with their colours, on which the same words constantly appeared : misery and privation ! And when, like Homer, I had finished the roll-call of my formidable army, I arrived; to adopt a legal phrase, at the “suspicious circumstances” of the case. I asked myself what it was that had awakened the idea of marriage in Félicité’s bosom so late in life, and had so suddenly brought back the warmth of summer there in the midst of autumn ? I strove to discover what charm could attract her towards that bilious-looking, dejected, and ungainly lover, whom Roger compares to a withered codling. How strange the delusion, which has led her to sacrifice for uncertain hopes a happiness at once secure and long enjoyed ! It is, then, too true that the greater part of Adam’s children have not as much wisdom as the single small coin of the Wandering Jew, and that they are not equal to meet the demands of each passing hour ; with them the past gives no security for the future, long years of reason prepare them only for folly. They mark their way like little Tom Thumb with his crumbs of bread, which were devoured by the birds of the air, and they always end in discovering themselves lost—like him, too, without a clue and without a ray of light.

But what more could I do in the matter ? I had cried out to the silly creature that the ogre’s cave

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was at hand, yet she was determined on continuing her course, confident that Providence would perform a miracle in her behalf, and throw the seven-leagued boots in her way. From this time forth my responsibility ceases, since nothing can be done to make her attend to her footsteps. I now return home with my lantern, leaving Félicité to all the perils of the road. Abandoned by her, I abandon her in my turn.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *A PLEASURE COMMON TO ALL AGES.*

JUST now three travelling musicians stopped before my windows. They were three Germans, who played portions of a symphony with marvellous accuracy and effect.

I have always felt music to be the complement of language. It gives rise to certain sensations which speech would leave unawakened, and expresses peculiar shades of sentiment for which our dictionaries have no words. It is not, as Beaumarchais says satirically, "What is not worth the trouble of writing is sung," but rather what cannot be written or said. Hence the charm that exists in that indefinite mode of expression! Music is like the clouds of an autumnal sky, in which we discover, one after the other, every image that corresponds to our fancy. Each one conceives his own poem during those transient melodies. The notes seem insensibly to metamorphose themselves, to take a visible form, and to glide before us like visions.

Sometimes it is a fairy landscape which is evolved

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slowly out of the harmonious chords. We see the distant horizon spread itself out, the marble columns rise in order, and the crystal fountains sparkle in the sun ; we hear the wind blow through the perfumed heather ; the sun shines, the birds warble, a thousand graceful forms glance forth from between the foliage. We are in the gardens of Armida, or the palaces of the Arabian Nights.

Then on a sudden the whole vanishes and the scene changes. Behold now rugged mountains reaching to the clouds, vast lakes sleeping at their feet, then the Alpine horn prolonging its note down into the ravine ; night descends, the wind murmurs mournfully through the pines. Three men advance from three different paths towards the “*Gruttli*,” where they will swear to effect the deliverance of their country.

The heroic vision vanishes in its turn ; this time it is the oboe which we hear ; joyous shouts reply ; the village dance begins ; we see the rhythmic steps, we hear the shouts of laughter ever on the increase, till on a sudden the air becomes heavy, the sky grows black, and the thunder is heard in the distance. It comes nearer : it bursts and scatters the affrighted dancers. Do you not recognise the pastoral symphony of Beethoven ?

Charming and ever fresh dreams, which age cannot dissipate ! for if other joys depart, this, at least, remains to us undiminished.

It is, in fact, in our declining years that the pleasures selected in youth become to us a resource or a punishment. Whilst gross indulgences lose their zest of themselves, refined enjoyments seem to acquire new strength, and to become more perfect by repetition.

I have just experienced this while listening to the symphony performed under my window. Leaning back in my chair, with my eyes closed, I listened in tranquil rapture. The violin, the tenor, and the violincello commenced at first a moderately quick movement, full of chords harmoniously grouped. It seemed to me like three friends starting together with equal steps on some morning's walk.

Very soon the violin became more rapid and its tones louder. It grew enthusiastic, no doubt, at the grandeur of the scene; it pointed out the sun lighting up the horizon—as with fire—the mists rent asunder like a veil—and creation, surprised from its sleep, appearing before the eyes in all the grace of its immortal beauty.

The tenor assented from time to time with an admiring exclamation, and the violincello added a few words with the gravity of old age.

All three reached the summit of a hill. There the violincello burst into a sacred anthem, sustained by the voices of his two companions.

During this time the sun had risen and inundated the landscape with his golden beams. The hum of bees was heard around, and the brook bubbling

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through the glades. The three friends seated themselves for an interesting chat.

The violin began by revealing the dreams of his youth ;—a glorious name ;—requited love ;—trials surmounted. He described himself, as holding realities at the mercy of his imagination, like the Archangel Raphael with the devil beneath his feet.

Then the tenor spoke in his turn ; he recounted his arduous labours, his enduring patience, the many objects of his life already achieved, and those beyond, which he sees with clearer vision ; for him, life is a field ripe for the harvest, and his sickle is already thrust in among the corn.

Lastly, the violincello raised his voice, vibrating with a thrill of tenderness. He repeated the confidences of his two companions while joining to them the lessons of experience. Chanted by him, the youthful song of Hope grows calmer. The triumphal hymn of Middle Age becomes more tender, and brought back by that sympathetic voice of wisdom, the tenor and the violin conclude by uniting with the violincello in one melodious burst of harmony.

I only recovered from my species of hallucination on hearing the plate of the Germans jingling with the pence dropped into it by the street auditory. I willingly added my gift to theirs, and the three musicians appeared so delighted with the amount that they departed playing a Hungarian dance-tune, which made me start.

How well I knew that air! It was the one played at the ball where I saw, for the first time, her who was to be my life's happiness. I have never heard it since without recurring in thought to that evening which decided my fate; while listening to it, I feel as if borne back to the age when life appeared to me as a book with uncut leaves, which I possessed, wholly ignorant of its contents.

I shut the window, and sat down again, with my forehead resting against the marble chimney-piece; my memory slowly remounting the stream of thirty years, which has borne away on its bosom so many relics of myself. Insensibly all the images of the past revived, I saw myself again young, poor, and devoted, as on the day when Louise and I had no other resource than the invincible confidence of those who believe and hope. These recollections passed through my heart like a zephyr of spring across the frozen earth. I felt my heart revive and soften, and, rising up, I opened my writing-desk, and from a secret drawer, known only to myself, took out a little mother-of-pearl casket, which exhaled an odour of roses: I felt as if breathing an atmosphere which had encircled my youth. But, courage! let me not shrink from facing these souvenirs of happiness; let me walk without a shudder amidst these fairy palaces, which time has trampled into ruins! But let us be careful doubly to lock the door, so that none may interrupt us in our examination.

## CHAPTER IX.

### LOOKING OVER AN OLD WRITING-DESK.

THE examination of a writing-desk long in use is not an unimportant event. Who, indeed, can be certain of penetrating with impunity into those archives of the past, of recurring without embarrassment to the records there of his sentiments and his habits?

What accusations are there not often in the mute witnesses of our past life? It seems as if each object that attracts our notice raised its voice to recount a chapter of our history; and be the recital displeasing or not, it is in vain for us to thrust back the troublesome narrator and depart; its voice continues to vibrate, for we carry it within.

To speak truly, the examination of our writing-desk is but the examination of our conscience, drawer-wise.

The time has now arrived to examine mine. Let us put aside the little casket, and see what else is to be found.

*The Top Drawer.*—This contains receipted bills only. At first their appearance gratifies me. They are all arranged in order, according to their dates, and seem to proclaim my prudence and regularity; but a slight reflection cuts short my pride. If I were to look through them, how many would testify to my negligence or my caprice! How many expenses injudiciously incurred! How many barren purchases! How much dearly bought experience! Of all the money represented by these bills, how little has really conduced to my advantage, or my gratification! How numerous the resources frittered away through want of reflection! I fancy I read on the back of each bill an accusing sentence traced by the hand which wrote in Belshazzar's banqueting-hall: "Vanity. Folly. Self-gratification." I will not read a word more, and rapidly shut up these ungracious monitors.

*Second Drawer.*—Here are lying physicians' prescriptions and the remedies supplied. Bills again, settled with the most exacting of all creditors! Those just pushed aside recalled the ransom paid to secure the necessaries or the luxuries of life, these recall the ransom paid to our infirmities. They are at once a souvenir and a warning; like the preacher, the day after some frivolous entertainment, they

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seem to say to me, “Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return . . .”

*Third Drawer.*—The disclosures of this drawer are not so serious, and its lessons are less severe. It contains only specimens of minerals, shells, and a few antiquarian remains. This is the nucleus of twenty collections, always being commenced and always interrupted ; a new proof of man’s inconstancy and love of change. Madame de Staël has said that, “All things here below are but beginnings.” My drawer could be brought forward as proof of this assertion in case of need.

*Fourth Drawer.*—Historical and literary notes ; manuscripts going no further than the titles ; numerous illegible or incompletely expressed thoughts ; hieroglyphics which will never find a Champollion ! My life has been passed, like that of so many others, in mentally composing the preface of a book which will never be produced. Some minds resemble certain trees ; in the spring they are covered with blossoms, not one of which ripens into fruit in the autumn.

*Fifth Drawer.*—This drawer claims a larger share of my attention. Here are the letters of friends long lost to me. Some who perished by the way possess no longer a name but on their tombstones ; others have changed their route, and worship at new shrines. Alas ! the former are but dead, whilst the latter are deserters ! The remembrance of the first awakens regret only ; that of the second, grief and indignation.

What! to have started together, with the same faith, the same standard, the same hopes, and at the first cross-road to see the most cherished of our comrades stealthily creep away and join the hostile camp!—to hear him blaspheme names which formerly he revered, laugh at the enthusiasm he has shared, reply by a rifle-shot to the battle-cry which he has shouted at our side! What more bitter disappointment! How it blights the soul and destroys our faith in the future! But let me not dwell on these thoughts; I do not wish to read the evidence of forgotten promises and outraged confidences. . . . One who wrote them, whom I loved, exists for me no longer on this earth; another spirit animates the form which bears his name.

*Sixth Drawer.*—The casket is in this drawer—the casket which I am now at length to open. But stay! My heart beats more rapidly, my hand trembles! There!—the cover is raised! Behold them!—the treasures of my poor home, the diamonds of my domestic crown—all the sweet mementoes of the past are gathered here! I can read again the history of my youth and of my manhood, written, like the annals of the Incas, in speaking symbols. Each object that my eye rests upon recites a chapter. This faded wreath of laurel recalls the triumph of my son William when leaving his college loaded with prizes. That orange-flower, taken from the bouquet of my daughter Annie, brings back the day

of tearful joy when her mother and I entrusted her to the love of another protector. Alas! both were soon compelled to quit our fireside, obedient to the calls of duty; both, rarely seen since, pass their lives henceforth far away! I press you to my lips, pale flower and poor faded leaves, which now are the sole representatives to me of my son and daughter!

But how many other souvenirs lie beside these! The wedding-ring, taken from their mother's finger before wrapping her form in the winding-sheet; the coral necklace, the silver bracelet, which adorned her in the days of her youth and beauty! Oh! how at their sight all the past rushes back upon my memory!

I seat myself, I take up, one after the other, with a trembling hand, these pledges of bright years gone by. I re-open our letters, grown yellow with time. Here they all are, the very same as they were written in the height of our passion, with their delicate writing and crossed pages, the paper crumpled from being long carried in the pocket or near the heart, and with their double and treble postscripts. O happy age! when we have never said quite all. I read them again, divided between tenderness and smiles. How numerous are the notes of admiration! One might imagine them a regiment of diminutive lovers riding by in single file. But then, what overflowings of the heart! what a well of hope! what perfect faith in every exaggeration! How easy the impossible

appears of attainment! But what is the good of being young if it be not to accomplish miracles? From the heights of our enthusiasm we extend our gaze over the four points of the horizon, looking for the wondrous raven that fed the anchorites. It is only when hunger and night are come that we lower our eyes and think of winning our daily bread from the earth instead of expecting it from the heavens.

From one of these letters, which recount the romance of our youth, there suddenly fall the remains of a few wild flowers. Ah! time has in vain destroyed their form and their colour. I recognise them. It is Louise's first gift—the fragile link which first united our destinies.

The circumstances are still vividly impressed on my mind. It was on a day towards the end of June, as we were returning from a long walk. Her uncle was talking to me about building and plantations, whilst she wandered away to pluck from the border of the meadows century and honeysuckle-blossoms. Absorbed in spite of myself, I followed the niece with my eyes, only half listening to her uncle, when I saw her suddenly stop. A little child was standing in the middle of the path. His fair head scarcely reached to the top of the ripe grass. He was looking about in alarm, and his eyes were full of tears. Louise had approached to inquire what was the matter, and we also hastened to join her. The child was confused, and at first afraid to answer; but she

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immediately went down on her knees on the grass to reach his level, and drew him within her arms, resting his moistened cheek against her own, and reassuring him with kisses. We then learned that he had left the house to join his mother in the hay-field, and that, in running after flowers and birds, he had lost his way. Louise cried out at once that we must take him home ; but the little fellow lived some distance off, and was too tired to walk. Her uncle began to raise objections, and proposed to leave him at the first farm - house. The eyelids of Louise, who thought of the mother's distress, began to tremble. I caught the child up in my arms, asking gaily which was the way. She gave a joyful cry, and her looks thanked me. Her uncle was still inclined to object ; but I had already started off, and he followed, grumbling.

We traversed meadows where flowery waves stirred by the evening breeze undulated around us. The smell of new-cut hay reached us from every side, and the tinkling bells of the waggon-teams as they approached the solitary farms resounded from amidst the woods.

Louise walked by my side, playing with the child —who became every moment more reassured—and waving at him her nosegay of wild flowers, which he long tried in vain to lay hold of; but, profiting at last by the momentary inattention of his playmate, he leaned over my shoulder, stretched out his little

arm with surprising rapidity and caught the flowers, bursting out into one of those peals of fresh and triumphant laughter which are like the song of childhood. Louise had not succeeded in getting possession of them again when we arrived at the farmhouse.

Every one there was in trouble about the lost child, and on seeing him his mother rushed forward with shouts of joy and with open arms. She tried to express her gratitude, she could only utter a few stifled words ; her tears were her best thanks.

Night was now approaching, and the town was still at some distance, so that Louise's uncle became impatient to take leave. As I approached the little boy to kiss him, he threw his arms round my neck, and pressing his curly head against my heated forehead with caressing grace, presented me with the nosegay stolen from Louise.

I looked at her, she smiled and blushed at the same time.

“ May I accept it ? ” I asked.

“ Have you not earned it ? ” she replied, in gentle tones.

I kissed the little boy tenderly and kept the flowers. I have had them by me ever since, and here they are, but become, alas ! what all things become here below —ashes.

Continuing my examination, I turn up my familiar correspondence—notes exchanged with Louise during

our short periods of separation—long love-letters ; and, going still further back, all that related to the difficult arrangements of our marriage. Here are the rough drafts of my appeals to her uncle, where notes of admiration reappear as thick as the bayonets of an attacking column ; then the uncle's replies, short, dry, fortified with impregnable walls ; it was a tedious negotiation, which, however, can be condensed into the following common-place dialogue :

*Uncle.* Sir, my niece has no dowry.

*Myself.* I know it, sir ; but I love her.

*Uncle.* You too, sir, are equally without fortune.

*Myself.* Sir, I acknowledge it, but I can work, and I love her !

*Uncle.* Reflect on all the trials that the future may bring.

*Myself.* Ah, sir, God will aid us, and I shall have courage, for I love your niece—I really love her !

What was there to oppose to that supreme argument—I love her ? And, indeed, is not everything contained in those words when we are sure of uttering the very truth ; when we do not mistake a caprice for the heart's choice ; inclination for lasting affection ? To love is to fathom all that makes another soul resemble ours. It is esteem blended with tenderness, confidence with a perfect sense of security. It is to find at once a confidant, a counsellor, a support. It is, in fine, to aspire to become better, by completing our own being. The “ selfishness shared by two,” of

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which novelists speak, is but the love of a day, of a week. But the love destined to accompany us from the spring-time to the winter of life, through periods of suffering and decay, as well as of success and joy; that love does not harden the heart, it enlarges it, impelling us to communicate our own happiness to all around. Our arms, far from enclosing the being only whom we love, extend themselves to embrace the world with tender sympathy; we desire, like the Roman Pontiff, to comprehend in the same benediction, the home and the universe, "*urbi et orbi.*"

Blessed for ever be the day when I understood this, and chose for the partner of my journey through life, not the lady seated in her carriage, but the gentle and courageous traveller on foot, who knew how sweetly to endure the dust of the road or the rain from the heavens.

I am just interrupted at this reflection by three taps at the door. It is Félicité, who comes to tell me that there is some one outside with a letter for me.

"Who is it?"

"Réné."

The poor girl's voice faltered as she uttered the word.

She, too, has accepted Réné without calculation, without caprice, because he is the choice of her heart. To all my recent objections might she not have responded, as I did formerly to Louise's uncle? "I love

him!" and this reason, which in my own case seemed to me irresistible, in hers I have pronounced a weak and inadequate one. But wherefore two weights and two scales?

Alas! it is because age has come to freeze my logic, and has clipped its two wings : Hope and Faith. It is because now long journeys alarm me, and distant horizons make me tremble.

Again, who knows if what I have been thinking was for her interest, was not for my own in disguise? if I have not taken alarm at this marriage chiefly because it would leave me without a servant, and give me all the annoyance of looking out for another? Alas! our hearts are a theatre, where the actors resemble the rest of their brethren ; how many worthless fellows there are playing the parts of heroes.

On this occasion, at all events, I will not be their dupe ; memories of my youth, you shall not in vain have carried me back into the past ! I feel your influence, and will obey it.

I step forward, open the door, and summon Réné, and then Félicité. I question them with friendly familiarity upon their mutual attachment, and their projects ; both appear full of good intentions and of hope, without indulging in vain illusions. They expect to meet with obstacles ; they do not fear to contend with poverty and fatigue ; all their ambition is confined to supporting these inevitable ills in each other's company. Their simple hearts still retain

some of the impulses of youth which crave only permission to burst forth.

Let them, at any rate, gratify these according to their hearts' desire ! After all, God has not created happiness for the beautiful, the strong, and the successful only. Every harvest has its gleaners.

I resume the genial manner with Félicité which I ought never to have laid aside. I assure Réné that I will speak for him to his master, who knows as yet nothing of this courtship ; and, as I was determined to punish myself for yesterday's severity, I promise them to take charge of the wedding arrangements.

Upon this, Félicité quite lost her senses ; she tried to speak, but could only burst into a laugh, which ended in sobs. Réné twisted his lank body till he looked like a note of interrogation, and kept repeating, "Oh, sir !" while turning his hat about all the time. I dismissed them with a smile, and they quitted me contented with themselves ; leaving me in the same happy frame of mind.

## CHAPTER X.

## LETTERS.

**T**HIS is the day I receive my children's letters ; both are lying on yonder desk ; I recognise each by the shape of the envelope and the colour of the paper. Dear visitors ! whom I look forward to every week, ye bring me, as it were, a faint echo of well-known but distant voices.

A letter has always had for me an undefinable charm. I cannot look at the folded sheet which a fragile seal protects without thinking that, within, there is some portion of a human soul, a flitting ray of life that has traversed space to reach my hands. How often, when leaning on my elbow at the balcony, and the postman has galloped by, the thought has struck me of what mournful mysteries, what disguised hatreds, what charming confidences, and perhaps sublime impulses, he has been the bearer ! The whole

inner world, of which we see only the mask, had there its secret history; the inmost confessions of humanity passed there, confided to the care of coarse and indifferent hands.

Those of our postman, I am convinced, are of that stamp, as I watch him every morning sowing here and there his sad or joyous crop of tidings with perfect indifference. Each letter is for him nothing more than a draft payable to the bearer, and oh! how happy have I ever been in my own case to meet the demand. If letters are a pleasure at all periods of life, they are more especially the resource of the aged, condemned as they are to repose. This is their only means of visiting the absent; they can listen thus without fatigue to the outpourings of quiet confidences; the tyranny of daily duties no longer deprives them of leisure to reply; that which formerly was felt but as a trifling claim on their attention may now become one of their serious occupations.

No other employment appears to me more delightful. These letters from my children, which I read when they first arrived, I now read through again before replying to them, for I am about to enter into all those details which make me share their lives —here, ask for some explanation; there, send some advice; and then, in my turn, recount all my actions and thoughts, with no other desire than to keep wide open every gate between our souls.

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My daughter Annie's letter inspires me with a precious hope; she speaks of confiding to my care at the next holidays her children, whom I have not seen since they were in the cradle. When they leave school, by taking a somewhat circuitous route, they will be able to reach my house. All that is necessary will be to find a suitable companion for them. May Heaven, in its love, grant one in answer to my prayers!

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE DINNER OF ST. NICHOLAS.

ROGER called for me this afternoon to go and dine with our old schoolfellows who meet together on each St. Nicholas-day. During many years past I had ceased to be present at this anniversary, and almost forgotten those who were in the habit of attending. I asked Roger what guests were to be there.

"Three only," said he, "but they are old friends whom you must recollect well. There is, first, Beau-lieu, the barrister, an aged Alcibiades, who fancies that his wig conceals his sixty-seven years; he sports a frill to his shirt, and continues to boast of the calves which he once had. Then comes Lefort, an excellent fellow in his way, who is persuaded that he was born for literature, from having discovered his unfitness for any other profession. He speaks of Horace as of a contemporary of his, though he is only seventy years old. Lastly, Heriot, exactly one year younger, but graver by ten, who thinks himself profound because he takes snuff."

I was astonished to find Roger so intimately acquainted with the precise ages of our old comrades.

"Ah! I see that you are ignorant of my being occupied at present with statistics! You must, then, know that I have undertaken to discover the average duration of life in our district; for the last three days I have been poring over the registrar's books! As soon as the ladies know that I am verifying people's ages, I shall be held on a par with the great powers of the state; people will even begin to ask after the health of my parrot!"

At length we arrived at the hotel. The three guests were already there, and our reception was just what might have been expected. Beaulieu addressed me between snatches of verse and the songs of our boyhood; Lefort quoted to me a line of Virgil; whilst Heriot coughed thrice very gravely and took a pinch of snuff. Roger assured me that this was his usual manner of proving that he thought.

Dinner was shortly afterwards announced. It had been ordered by the barrister, who, of all the works published by his magisterial brethren, knows thoroughly, I believe, only that of Brillat-Savarin.\* He began a dissertation on transcendental gastronomy, interspersed with quotations from Berchoux and Désaugiers, and ended by pathetically lamenting the changes which French cookery has undergone.

\* Author of the "Physiology of Taste," and a great authority on dining.

"We eat still, but we no longer know how to dine," said he, assuming the style of his author. "Dinners are become nothing more than exhibitions of luxury, or a mere excuse for assemblies; they are no longer an end, but only a means; hence look at their falling off! You are served with flowers, you are made to eat without being allowed time to criticise. Gone are the learned debates which formed the taste and educated the palate. Find me a man now who, like the Chevalier de Souvré, could distinguish sixty-four sorts of wine by their bouquet only, and tell you the green peas of Clamart from those of Epinay."

"Zounds! I hope there are no such men now-a-days," interrupted Roger.

"Such men exist no more," exclaimed Heriot, opening his snuff-box with the air of a Newton discovering the system of the universe.

"And do you know why, my dear friend?" interposed the barrister in his airy way. "It is because we have abandoned our national traditions to introduce barbarous customs and viands—a gastronomic cosmopolitanism has ruined us. It is that which has desecrated our tables with so many Italian patties and English dishes."

"Virgil has said," observed Lefort, who longed for a chance to bring in a quotation, "*'Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.'*"

"It is the effect of the revolutionary volcano," added Heriot, sadly.

"One moment, I pray," interrupted Roger. "What social disaster, permit me to ask, has caused the naturalisation of plum-pudding and of maccaroni? Heaven help us! if we are to believe Beaulieu, the history of humanity becomes a question of the kitchen."

"Recollect the doctor's aphorism," said the barrister, with a contemptuous smile. "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are."

"And I, too, will do the same," cried Roger, impatiently. "Bring hither, without naming them, the men famous through all time and in all places, and by this test I will engage to recognise them. To those who tell me, 'I live on what I find at hand, without any concern about it,' I will reply, 'You are Epaminondas, Cato, St. Vincent de Paul, Turenne,' to those who boast to me of their feasts, 'You are Sardanapalus, Lucullus, or Turcaret.'"

"Bravo! bravo!" cried Beaulieu, ironically; "our friend Roger is just the same, always standing counsel for the present."

"In other words, of chaos," interposed Heriot, gravely.

"But, say what you will," continued the barrister, reclining in his chair, and throwing one leg over the other, "I maintain, my dear friends, that everything is decaying in this our poor world; that the dinners are less choice, the women less beautiful, the men less agreeable."

"How can it be otherwise?" interrupted Lefort;

"mathematics and modern languages are taught at the expense of classical learning, the result of which is that French itself is forgotten. Our modern authors no longer recognise the grand precept of the legislator of Parnassus. 'In fine, without language, the greatest author in spite of his most strenuous efforts, is but a wretched writer.'"

"Just as without the restitution of ancient forms of society, there will never be anything else but rebellious subjects," concluded Heriot.

And all three, uniting in a sort of plaintive chorus to the glory of the past, began to regret its famous suppers, its dances, tragedies, nosegays to Chloris, its corporations, its parliaments, and its farmers-general of the taxes.

Roger strove in vain to reply ; thanks to the champagne, our fellow-guests' enthusiasm appeared to increase and become each moment more boisterous. At length Lefort arose, and, after gaining attention, proposed a toast : "To all that has been, and that exists no more."

"Never!" cried Roger, whose patience was exhausted. "Away with your glories of the past! Make your abode amongst ruins, if your tastes incline you to do so ; for my part, I prefer new habitations."

"The poor fellow has forgotten the happy days of youth," cried Lefort, piteously. "*'Contemptor temporis acti.'*"

"Say, rather, that Raymond and I alone here

can recall them," answered Roger, " and hence we alone can estimate their value. You, on the contrary, old fools as you are, what you take for the present day is but yourselves ; you fancy that the world has lost all that age has robbed you of. If the dinner we have had to-day appears inferior to the suppers of your time, Beaulieu, blame only your own appetite ; and do not feel surprised at preferring the gavotte which you could dance formerly, to the valse which you cannot dance now. . . . You, Heriot, because you were once mayor of your native town, and a younger man has taken your place, you would return back, if you could, to the time of the Crusades : and as for Lefort, he cannot tolerate the least advanced scholar who neglects the rhetoric embalmed like his own compositions in the 'Almanack of the Muses.' Alas ! my friends, the error you fall into is that of all the world. Each of us wants to regard Time as his lackey and bound to follow him, whereas Time belongs only to God. He travels onward and onward, with an ever equal step, and because our own slackens, we are apt to think that Time advances too rapidly ; that he has gone mad ; that he rushes towards an abyss. . . . Heaven preserve me from thinking thus, my friends ; if I can follow him at a distance only, I will at any rate send after him my best wishes for his prosperous journey. . . . Drink, as you have proposed, Lefort, 'To all that has been, and exists no longer.' Raymond and I will drink 'To what is, and to what is to come ! ' "

At these words we both raised our glasses till they touched, while we heard the ringing sound of those of our companions, for none had been convinced; in fact, they all three very shortly recommenced their tirade against "the present." At first they spoke of faded pleasures, of increasing infirmities, of the wide desert spreading around them. Roger and I listened in silence; but when, passing from complaint to accusation, they wanted to describe the world as bereft henceforth of joys and of virtues, and rapidly descending into a gulf; when their voices, blended in the utterance of a mournful prediction, repeated in chorus that the knell of the human race was tolling, Roger started up impetuously and exclaimed :

"It does toll, indeed, but it is for yourselves alone! The night which is descending is not over the world, but is in your own eyes. Do you not perceive your stooping forms, your tottering steps, the blood stagnating in your veins? We all of us here belong to the past, that is, to what must perish, in order to afford free space for the plough which moves forward in the service of the future. The eternal Scythe-man understands. He is there, behind that very door, waiting only for the master's summons : 'The harvest is ready!' Another instant, and you will see him enter, scythe in hand."

The door did indeed open, but it was to admit the landlord with his bill, and after settling, we took leave of each other, and separated.

Roger and I watched their departure ; then, nodding his head, he murmured :

“ Go, worshippers of past ideas, senators of perished kingdoms, crouch beside tombs instead of smiling over cradles ; and, above all things, do not complain that your latter years are cold and charmless, you who refuse to believe that youth has still its sunshine and its illusions. Let us, friend Raymond, stop to the last upon the deck of life’s vessel, sympathising in the fears and hopes of the sailors, and not go below to sleep, predicting shipwreck. When life ebbs within us, let us borrow life from others, be strong with their strength, and happy in their joys.”

We had reached the path beside the canal, the sun, already almost sunk beneath the horizon, shed around us only his dying rays, the hills faded away in the distant shadows, and the objects in the valley, growing less and less distinct, slowly disappeared. My companion stretched his hand towards the west.

“ See,” said he, “ the daylight is nearly gone, and those who do not look beyond themselves might declare, like our fellow-guests just now, that the sun has set for ever ; but the man who reflects a moment knows that, when the night descends upon his own eyes, other eyes have already caught sight of the dawn.”

## CHAPTER XII.

MR. BAPTISTE.

I HAVE spoken to Roger about our servants' proposed marriage, and he has discussed with a great deal of kindness the means of facilitating its execution. He will keep Réné, who, he says, is accustomed to his grumbling, and Félicité must undertake by herself the care of the little shop which they intend to start.

It remains now for me to find some one who can replace her at home. Roger proposes a man-servant set at liberty by the death of the Count de Farel. This Count, it appears, was a philosopher of the school of Rousseau, a little odd, but a worshipper of all the great virtues. Those who laughed at his ideas never came into his society without discovering this. His valet has been educated by him, and he, too, they say, is a philosopher; a great reader in his leisure mo-

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ments, and able to talk like a professor. Roger, who knows and patronises him, proposed to send him to me to-day. I agreed, and at the time appointed our friend arrived.

He is a little spare old man, very respectful, but full of formality. He wiped his feet three times before crossing the threshold of my library, and, bowing, gave me his name :

“ Monsieur Baptiste.”

I looked at him with a slight misgiving.

“ You are the person sent by my friend Roger?”

“ I am, sir.”

“ You were in the service of the Count de Farel?”

“ During sixteen years.”

“ You are looking for a place?”

“ And I am told that you have one vacant, sir.”

“ Let us, then, talk the matter over . . . . Mr. Baptiste.”

“ I am come for that purpose, sir.”

And as he observed that I forgot to offer him a chair, he took one (the most distant, however), and waited for my inquiries.

I asked him what he could do ? He replied in a straightforward manner without boasting, so as to convince me that he was really equal to undertake all I required. My modest establishment did not repel him. He could accommodate himself to the meagre wages I had to offer ; I felt it useless to continue the inquiry further, and said to him :

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"Enough; we understand each other; I engage you, Baptiste."

"Mr. Baptiste," he interposed, gravely.

I looked up at him.

"Ah! I see, you are particular that I should not forget the Mr."

"Because I shall never forget your proper title in speaking to you, sir."

I could not help smiling.

"This may appear singular to you, sir," he added, calmly; "but I have my reasons. . . ."

"And may I, without indiscretion, ask you to explain them, Mr. Baptiste?"

"Certainly, sir, if it will interest you."

"Much."

"Well, sir! I believe that language influences our habits, and that too great a familiarity in the use of terms ends in begetting a want of proper respect."

"Is this observation your own, Mr. Baptiste?"

"No, sir, it is the Count's . . . who was, as perhaps you have heard, a great philosopher . . . ; but I also have recognised its justice in my own limited experience."

"I think it is perfectly correct, Mr. Baptiste."

"I feel both honoured and gratified at your agreeing with me, sir."

"I perceive that you have formed very decided opinions."

"I confess, sir, that the Count, my late master,

taught me to reflect seriously on the respective positions of masters and servants."

" And you have discovered . . .?"

" That, as a rule, what degrades one class ends by corrupting the other."

" Oh, oh ! these are very big words, Mr. Baptiste!"

" Not bigger than the subject demands, sir. In ordinary domestic life it is made to appear as if masters only have rights, and servants only duties ; the result of which is that the former are always tempted to the abuse of power, the latter to revolt."

" And what remedy do you propose, Mr. Baptiste?"

" The Count de Farel led me to believe that there exists but one, sir, viz., mutual respect. When an order is given politely, obedience has nothing revolting in it. I took no account of this formerly ; I only found it hard to yield submission. At that time domestic service appeared to me humiliating for an old man. The Count taught me the means of elevating it."

" How so ?"

" In requiring respect rather than high wages, sir, and in rendering my services sufficiently useful to make people unwilling to lose them. It is hard indeed to be only a servant when the hair grows grey ; it is time then to take care of one's dignity."

" You are quite right," cried I, " and I beg your pardon, Mr. Baptiste, for having smiled a few mo-

ments ago. I see now before me, for the first time in my experience, age ennobled under a livery. I only fear that you will not find many masters like your friend the Count."

"I know that, sir; the world regarded him as an original."

"Say rather as more than half a madman."

"Possibly; but as I have heard that you resemble him a little, sir . . ."

"I!" cried I, laughing; "upon my soul, people do me too much honour. I will try, however, not to fall in your estimation; but if unintentionally I should hurt your feelings in any way . . ."

"I will apprise you of it, sir."

"Agreed, . . . Au revoir, Mr. Baptiste."

"I have the honour to bid you good day, sir."

And bowing as gravely as an ambassador at an audience for taking leave, he retired.

Positively, I will give this *Mr. Baptiste* a trial; it may be a means of improving myself. Too frequently our domestics are but the ministers or the victims of our errors; I am curious to have one who will honestly make himself the judge of mine. But should he not serve me . . . well, he shall be my instructor. Education should cease only in the tomb.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## LEISURE HOURS.

**T**HIS morning I awoke early; the sun was stealing in between the window-blinds, and traversing the room with brilliant rays, in which innumerable atoms disported themselves. I lost myself for some time in observing the commotion of these worlds infinitesimally small, which are but as the first step in the immense scale of creation. While regarding them I seemed to myself to become grander and stronger, and to feel increased happiness in my condition of manhood.

It is the beginning of autumn, the morning air has already grown chilly. I see from my recess the roofs covered with a thin lace-work of hoar-frost; my warm bed, from the force of contrast, feels still more comfortable; I enjoy it with an undefined sense of pleasure. Without, all is in motion; the

heavy waggons shake the pavement in passing, the street-cries grow frequent, steps hurry to and fro in the court-yard, voices answer each other. I hear the ostler whistling his favourite tune to the creaking of the pulleys at the village well; the birds, too, are chirping and twittering in the garden or on the roofs; the world has resumed its headlong course, and with it recommence the day's preoccupations, debates, and exhausting labours. All around is agitation and unrest, whilst I prolong the sweet sensations of drowsiness.

It is old age which gives me this leisure without remorse. A veteran of life, I have the right to watch the daily activities of others without sharing them; my task is done; contemplating the result of my labours, I may fold my arms; the last hours of evening belong to myself alone.

I had never before reflected on this privilege. Youth is a forced apprenticeship, in which one's time, will, intelligence, everything is the property of one's master. Our feet carry us well, but stir only at the word of command. Manhood imposes on us fresh duties at every instant; middle life increases the burden of our responsibilities; old age alone is really free. The world of which we were the slaves signs, then, at length our order of release. Ours are henceforth the long nights of repose, the walks without any defined object, the uninterrupted chit-chats, the whimsical readings, the hours spent at one's ease;

no longer have we at our doors the six week-days crying out to us, like Bluebeard in the popular tale, “ Will you come down there from above ?”

I make a note of this new-found pleasure of old age. Henceforth I shall endeavour to enter more fully into it, by recalling the thousand fetters from which old age has delivered me.

Already this morning I have prolonged with studied sensuality the pleasure of late rising. Warm in bed, and watching the sun, which seemed to enliven everything around me, I listened a long while to the sounds of movement and of labour which buzzed in the streets with that kind of voluptuous thrill which is felt by a man under a friendly roof when he hears,

Striking on the sonorous pane,  
The nimble hail which strikes and bounds again.

At length I arose ; at the first sound of my bell Félicité brought me my chocolate.

“ What weather we have, Félicité ! ”

“ Yes, indeed, sir ; very bad.”

“ How do you mean bad, do you not see the sun shining ? ”

“ But, sir, do you not see the white frost ? ”

“ Doubtless, but that will only make the air keener and more healthy.”

“ Not for the young lettuces, sir.”

“ Why are you thinking about the young lettuces, Félicité ? ”

"Because Réné has sown some."

I smiled, but I understood all. Good girl! she has already no other consideration but for Réné; she is interested in all that interests him. What matters it, the object of that interest? That which people love is always important enough to unite them when they love it in common.

However, as I have a different barometer from that of Félicité, I persist in regarding the morning as a fine one, and set out for a walk.

I hesitate at first which road to take; nothing requires my presence more in one direction than another; my time is my own, and every route is open to me. At length I make up my mind for a walk on the hills. I will go as far as the cottage of honest old Bouvier; it is now a long while since I have seen either him or his nephew Armand.

I ascend the narrow pathway which winds round the base of the hill. The hedges, almost entirely stripped of their leaves, are studded with red, brown, or yellow berries, around which hover flights of birds. I cross the fallow land, where the pearly dewdrops tremble on the blades of tall grass; some cows, feeding there, turn round as I pass, and regard me with vague and peaceful looks. I reach the summit, and rest awhile.

The valley at my feet is still half enfolded in the frosty mist, which rises slowly like curling smoke; around me there is nothing but heather, from which

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the lapwings fly out with their plaintive cry. Lower down, farms and villages are dotted about ; and I see, here and there, ploughs at work turning up their annual furrows across the stubble.

On resuming my walk, I encounter one of these, drawn by a powerful pair of horses, and guided by a young labourer. The plough-shear cuts through the soil as easily as the bow of a ship through the waters. Seated by the hedge, a peasant attracts my attention and salutes me. I recognise him.

“ Ah ! it is old Jacob !”

“ I see that you have not forgotten me, sir, although we have not met for so long a time.”

“ True, my good Jacob ; but what are you doing there ?”

“ I am looking at others, sir, going on with what I began.”

“ Ah, yes ! I recollect this field was a heath ; it is you, then, who ploughed it up ?”

“ Yes, this one and all the rest you see down the slope. When I came here to the ‘*Mornières*’ there were nothing but stony and barren wastes ; now the wheat of our Heavenly Father springs up all around.”

“ And it gives you pleasure to see the result of your labours ?”

“ It does, sir ; for when I look at the ears of corn covering the slope down to the rivulet, I say to myself, ‘ God may summon thee away, old Jacob ;

thou wilt leave some proofs of work well done behind thee.'"

I congratulated him and wished him good-bye ; but his words lingered in my memory ; I repeated them like those airs which run in the head and one hums through involuntarily.

"*To leave something well done behind one;*" but is not this in reality the object of life, which each of us carries out according to his powers and condition ? The poorest mason, bent down with age, can look at the house which he has built ; the aged shipwright follows with his eyes the vessel his tools have fashioned, as it returns from distant countries with the brunts of many a tempest ; the most poverty-stricken labourer looks on the tree he has planted, the pathway he has opened, the road he has laid out ; and all can say to themselves that they have attached their mark to a work which will long survive them. But as for me—what enduring work have I accomplished ? where is the monument which should signalise my course ? Since the accident of birth did not destine me to transform the material world, to raise with my own hands a visible memorial, why have I found no place in art or in science ; or why, in default of genius, has not the Almighty endowed me with wealth at least ? why has He not permitted me to connect my name with some benevolent institution ? How is it that He has denied to me what He grants to others—the glory of having accomplished some good work ?

These ambitious thoughts, which hitherto had only crossed my mind, become for the moment fixed there and overwhelming. I feel dejected and humiliated at having been condemned to an anonymous existence, to die wholly to mankind on the day when the winding-sheet shall encircle my body. I think of the joy of leaving a name like those inscribed at the corners of the streets in our Capital, or which make our palaces illustrious, and confer honour on our statues of bronze or marble; proclaiming this or that man as a benefactor of the human race.

Alas! without even pretending to a glory like this, why can I not leave behind me some modest memorial?—be the great man of a village; attach my name to the parish schools, or to the public gardens where the old men repose at leisure. Could I but survive in a simple inscription, as on that granite fountain which is visible in the road yonder, and is surmounted by the name of him who erected it for the passer-by, my ambition would feel satisfied. That name will at least recall the memory of the man who once bore it; long years to come others will be able to read it as I am about to do now. . . .

Talking to myself thus, I arrived at the fountain and sought the inscription. Alas! the official hammer had demolished the humble decorations of the monument, transformed now, for the sake of uniformity, into a common roadside fountain; the inscription, too, had disappeared!

Then I thought of the many more celebrated names which had met with no better lot ; successively effaced by the hands of successive parties, they had reappeared only to disappear again. Their continuance in fame was only a turning-point amid revolutions. Kicked from the Pantheon to the gutter, they did not even obtain the respectful salutation which is bestowed on the passing funeral of the obscure ; if their fame attracted applause, it gave occasion also for abuse.

Ah ! let others, then, crave for themselves a stormy immortality ; better is it to disappear from the scene altogether than to leave one's memory exposed to such reverses. I renounce my longings ; I pray to God to pardon me for my rebellion, and exclaim with the poet :

Quit, oh quit the scene of fight,  
Where on swift, laborious wing  
The human insect spends its might,  
About a straw-mote, that ere night  
Some footstep crushes to a shapeless thing.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE PATRIARCH OF VIRGIL.

I FOUND Father Bouvier at home. Although he is my senior by nearly ten years, he continues to work in his garden, to tend his goats, and breed his canaries. He has no one to help him, and accordingly waits upon himself; the result of which is, as he gaily repeats, that he is always well pleased with his servant.

I surprised him in the act of stirring some pumpkin-soup, which he would have desisted from on my entrance; but, to prevent this, I seated myself at the corner of the fireplace.

“ Well, Father Bouvier, I am delighted to see that you are always so happy,” said I to him, looking up into his good-humoured face.

He began to laugh.

“ Why, good Heavens ! how could I be dissatisfied when I am in want of nothing ?” cried he.

I cast my eyes rapidly round the miserable chamber, which contains within the four whitewashed walls nothing but a bed, a table, a deal chest, and two straw-bottomed chairs ; the old man did not observe me.

" You came in by the yard, I suppose ?" resumed he.

" Yes."

" Well, how did you like the alteration ?"

" What alteration ?"

" Ah, I see, you did not discover it ! Why, the well has been covered over, and I have got a pump—yes, a pump with a handle, like well-to-do people ! Armand paid for it out of his savings, noble fellow ! He thought that at my age to draw water from a well is fatiguing and dangerous. The young ones are always mistrustful of the old ; ha ! ha ! ha ! . . . However, in spite of that, the pump is more convenient than the bucket, I must avow."

" I think I noticed some other novelty at the entrance to the garden."

" Oh yes, the beehives ; you are right, you have not seen them before ; I bought them this spring. I am not very sure, though, that bees are profitable ; but I love to hear those ' flies of the good God ' humming about my flowers. When one is old, you know, one must attach oneself to something. Besides, I only paid for one hive ; it was Armand, again, who gave me the other."

"I am very glad to hear it; I see that he continues to behave towards you as he ought."

"Armand!" cried the old man, letting his wooden spoon slip into the pumpkin-soup; "he is an angel, sir, so good, so gentle, so considerate about everything that can give me pleasure! Ah! no one can tell his worth but myself."

"And no one knows so well as Armand what he owes to you."

"Bah! what then have I done for him?" exclaimed the old fellow, beginning to stir his soup again; "I have, it is true, given him a seat here by my fireside, but could I leave him out in the gutter—like his aunt?"

"Ah! you recall her to my mind; what has become of her?"

"Madame de Lourière? Well, I have heard that she is very bad. Oh, sir, what a shocking woman that is! she complained formerly that Armand neglected her (and remember that she had forbidden him her house). In spite of this, when the poor fellow heard that she was almost come to her journey's end, he thought it his duty to pay her a visit. Well, what did she do, but refuse to see him, sending him down word by her servant that she knew he only came for his inheritance. Of course, Armand returned there no more. Really, sir, there are people who are like baskets to which Providence has forgotten to put handles; you cannot tell where to take hold of them at all."

"But, at all events, if your nephew has obtained nothing through the selfishness of Madame de Lourière during her lifetime, he will, of course, come into her property at her death?"

"I do not know that, I do not know that; the old woman is as whimsical as old Time. I am afraid that Armand will lose all. These hopes of inheritance are deceptive, sir; you may go with naked feet for twenty years waiting for dead men's shoes, and when you hasten forward to put them on, you find them sometimes on the feet of your neighbour."

"Do you suspect, then, that Madame de Lourière intends to make a will?"

"Who can tell? Mistress Fanny, her servant, is a clever woman, and has dug a moat round her house. No one enters there now without her permission, and it is very certain she has not done this for any good purpose. It is quite enough to look at her hypocritical face! That woman, sir, is deceit itself in a mob cap. You will see now that she will rob Armand of his inheritance."

"I trust he will know how to do without it."

"Oh! I am sure that he does not trouble himself about it, as far as he is concerned; but I do. The dear boy just manages to make a livelihood by his teaching, you know; but then he has projects which this little fortune would enable him to carry out. If his aunt only knew more of Armand, I have always thought that she would not have the heart to disinherit him. I only wish that I could have explained

the matter to her ; but she refused to see me : she detests me, and I just ask you, for what reason ?”

“ Because you have done for her nephew what she should have done for him herself, Father Bouvier. Your kind behaviour is a reproach to her.”

“ Then it is really in spite of myself, sir, for, so far from blaming her, I pity her ; she has lost the friendship of Armand, which, as one may say, was hers of right. Ah ! if she only knew its worth, I wager she would be glad of a share. Some judicious friend is wanted who could make her understand it all. You do not by chance know her yourself, do you, sir ?”

“ Pardon me, I used to meet her formerly a good deal, and if I could do anything for your protégé . . . .”

The old man seized my arm.

“ Ah, Mr. Raymond, only be so kind,” cried he, “ and the Lord will repay you ! Do not let her disinherit her nephew through an old woman’s malice ; let her suffer him to be happy after she is gone, without its costing her anything. . . . . But stop,” added he, lowering his voice, “ I think I had better tell you all ; the poor fellow wants to get married, and the girl whom he has chosen has, like himself, set her heart on the carrying out of their design. But her relatives will have nothing to do with a portionless bridegroom. The well-being, the happiness, the future itself, perhaps, of these two poor children is at stake ! Ah ! sir, if you could only explain the matter to Madame de Lourière !”

"I will do my best."

"Really?"

"To-morrow."

He pressed my hand with emotion.

"May Heaven reward you on our behalf, Mr. Raymond!" cried he. "I will not attempt to thank you . . . for I cannot find the words. . . . I want . . . but believe me, if matters turn out in accordance with justice and right, and I see my nephew Armand living happily, the object of my life will be accomplished, and I can then close my eyes exclaiming with joyful satisfaction, 'My God! Thy will be done.'"

While thus speaking, he reconducted me, in spite of my objections, towards the road, for which purpose we were obliged to cross his little garden, where clusters here and there of China-asters and chrysanthemums still displayed their bright blossoms. He gathered himself a bouquet of these for me, to which he added some China roses, already sered by the cold blasts of autumn; we then separated with expressions of mutual good wishes for each other's health and happiness.

On reaching the first bend of the hill I looked round, but the good old man was no longer at the garden gate, and his cottage had disappeared behind some clumps of hazel-bushes; though a column of smoke, wafted by the breeze, still indicated its position.

I invoked a hearty blessing on that humble dwelling whose master had found abundance in moderation,

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power in devotedness, and contentment in loving others ; and I long mused on the old man of Virgil, whose happy life is passed among flowery banks where the bees gather their plunder, and who, with his head resting on his arm, listens to the distant songs of the thrushes intermingled with the cooing of doves. Fascinating dream which the poet of the Eclogues resumes in the Georgics ; but a pagan dream after all, where the joys of the soul are forgotten. May thy old man sleep sweetly, Virgil, lulled by the rustling of leaves, and the murmur of the neighbouring rills ! The sleep of the aged Bouvier is still sweeter ; for in the midst of the soothing voices of creation, he hears those which whisper within himself, and recall the good he has accomplished.

## CHAPTER XV.

## MY LUXURIES.

ON my return I found the fire burning brightly in the dining-room, and the cloth laid for dinner. The walk had sharpened my appetite ; I seat myself in my large arm-chair with my feet on the fender. Before me is Father Bouvier's nosegay, the odour of which seems to diffuse the fresh country air about the room; the glowing embers crackle at my feet; the wind which has risen sounds along the passage, and I hear in the next room the song of the canary, who from his cage salutes the sun.

My soul unfolds itself in this atmosphere of harmonious tranquillity ; I feel my brain revive, my heart expand. Never in the days of strength and activity have I experienced this perfect sense of peace, this abandonment of myself to the sweet course of domestic habits.

Formerly my very leisure itself was intruded upon ;

it is only since old age has given me hours without occupation, that I fully enjoy the peace of home life, and appreciate its ever-varied delights; that existence at length bears me along from day to day without my holding the reins.

There is something violent in the happiness of our earlier years, which overpowers the feelings—a tendency to excess, which infuses a taste of bitterness in the very cup of pleasure itself. Slaves to the feverish activity of the blood, we do not stop at enjoyment, but overrun the mark. It is only when time has deadened this impetuosity, between ripe manhood and the decline of life, that we can be happy at our ease. There is a spring-time of old age which is the very realisation of peaceful enjoyment; until then we lavish our resources; now at length we begin to utilise the small change of happiness.

I have arrived at this period, and it is my intention to profit by it. Let others declare themselves Stoics, like Crates, let them account as nothing that “bundle of rags” of which God has nevertheless made a garment for our immortal essence; I will venture to exclaim with the good Chrysalus :

“ Call it rags who will; mine to me are dear !”

Before my body returns to the earth I will not deny it any of the innocent enjoyments which can gratify it, and send joyous echoes to the soul within. Has not the Almighty himself spread the creation

before us like a never-ending banquet? Has He not said to us, "Sow the seed and I will give thee the ear; cultivate the tree, the fruit shall ripen for thee; search the forest, and the rivers, and all that thy skill can compass shall be thine"? Enjoyment is the reward of acquisition. Let us then enjoy, without remorse, what we have won by our labour. O closing days of life! I will not rob you of what Providence has left you. I will not make you more morose than nature has intended; but will rather recall all the joys you still have at command, that they may dance together in the light of your setting sun and accompany you into the even-tide with their gentle songs.

On leaving the dinner-table to draw near the fire, Roger arrived; we took coffee together, and I repeated to him the lines of Delille on this nectar:

Mingled with honey from the distant west,  
From the tall canes by Afric's sons exprest,

and in return he informed me that the chemists, who formerly declared sugar to be unnutritious, had just discovered the contrary; which explains how it is that for the last fifty years half the world has been able to grow fat on it, to the great scandal of science.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## AN OLD EGOTIST.

ARMAND'S aunt inhabits, at one of the entrances of the town, a small house standing in a court-yard, or rather garden. The brass plate on the door warns you to wipe your feet and to ring gently. I recognise here all the usual precautions of Madame de Louriére, ever studious of her own comfort, and making her supreme law the maxim, "That one can never be too much occupied about oneself."

However, I conform to the regulation, and very soon a little side-window is opened and the servant appears.

I recognised Fanny by her large pale face and her heavy half-closed eyelids, which seem to have no other office than to conceal her looks; added to her fixed smile and drawling tones, intended to convey an impression of her gentleness.

"Whom do you want, sir?"

“Madame de Lourière.”

“Ah! Then you have not heard, sir? . . . Madam has been very ill for the last two months.”

“Yes, I know it; but can she not see an old acquaintance?”

“Ah! monsieur is an old acquaintance?” and Fanny darted a glance at me from beneath her eyelids as if she would read my very soul. “I am sure it would be a great pleasure to madam . . . but the physician has given orders that she should not be put to the least fatigue.”

“My visit will not be a long one.”

“Oh, I am quite sure that monsieur would not intrude upon her . . . but, unfortunately, madam is just at this moment asleep.”

“Well, then, at what time may I call again?”

“Alas! I cannot venture to say. . . . Monsieur is, indeed, very good to madam. . . .”

“You will tell her that I have called?”

“Monsieur may be sure that I will not fail to do so.” And she curtseyed and was about to close the window. I held it open.

“You know me then, Fanny, do you?”

“I, sir,” said she, surprised at hearing me address her by name; “indeed, sir . . . not exactly.”

“In that case, how will you be able to announce my visit to Madame de Lourière?”

“Dear me . . . I beg pardon. Perhaps, sir, you will give me your card?”

"I believe that would be useless."

"Why so, sir?"

"Because Fanny would probably forget to hand it to her mistress, as she forgot to ask me for my name just now."

"I assure you, sir . . ."

"Good morning, Fanny."

And I departed, while the artful woman followed me with a dubious look.

Evidently I cannot hope for admission to Madame Louri  re from her; the shortest way will be to address myself to the physician, who visits her mistress daily.

Mr. Dulac, at whose house I called with this object, willingly took charge of my commission, and, towards evening, he informed me that Madame de Louri  re seemed delighted on hearing my name. She herself, it appears, had thought of sending for me, being anxious to consult me on a legal matter, concerning which my advice would be valuable to her. I am to call when I please, and the sooner the better.

However, Mr. Dulac, who knows how difficult it is to pass the species of quarantine established by Fanny, has requested me to present myself at the time of his morning visit; he will himself take the proper means to introduce me.

I thank him, and arrive at Madame de Louri  re's door at the appointed hour. On ringing the bell, Fanny appears and recognises me; her countenance

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falls, but she makes an effort to conceal her annoyance beneath the mechanical smile she always contrives to put on.

“Good Heavens! it is you, sir, again. You are come to inquire how Madame de Louri  re is? You are really very good, sir; everything is going on favourably. . . .”

I interrupt her by saying: “Your mistress expects me: open the door!”

And as she pretends not to understand me, I ring again, and louder than before, when Mr. Dulac arrives and conducts me into the house himself, to the great disappointment of Fanny. He orders her to announce me to her mistress, who has been informed of my intended visit, and he leads me into a little parlour opening out of the hall.

“For the present I must beg permission to leave you,” said he; “I have a patient near here whom I am anxious to see. I will return after prescribing for him. Try to lose no time with Madame de Louri  re, for there is none to spare.”

At these words he shook hands and departed. Left thus alone, I begin to look around me. The furniture of the room is of the date of Louis XV., and, to hide the injuries of time, it has been re-covered. To look at those old Pompadour arm-chairs thrusting out, from beneath their white covers, their small fluted legs, reminds one of ancient marchionesses in their dressing-gowns, giving themselves the airs of youth.

Over the doors are represented rural scenes, where shepherdesses in satin robes are listening, with a bird perched on their fingers, to shepherds in velvet coats playing on the flageolet. The clock on the mantelpiece is ornamented with a young nymph in bronze gilt selling a basketful of cupids. Coloured engravings hung about the room represent mythological scenes, and a small bookcase is filled with the novels of the last century.

I look in vain for some evidence of habits of serious occupation; everything alike bears the stamp of languid trifling, of superannuated gallantry. This is in very deed the mournfully coquettish home of the same selfish and frivolous woman, whom I used to meet in bygone times.

At length Fanny reappears; her smile is more deceitful, and the tones of her voice are more honeyed than ever. She begs me to follow her, warning me, at the same time, that her mistress is very much exhausted through not having slept for several nights, and that much talking is bad for her. I allow myself to be led on without replying, and we arrive together before a door, which she opens.

A smell of ether and of orange-flowers comes wafted towards me like a gust of wind. I enter the chamber, and perceive Madame de Lourière reclining behind the bed-curtains.

The time during which I had been kept waiting

she had turned to account. Raised up into a sitting posture, she had thrown over her shoulders a shawl trimmed with lace, and put on a closely plaited cap, with a scarlet riband round her forehead. Some locks of grey hair, overlooked in the hurry of this improvised toilette, were hanging down her leaden cheeks, and her eyes had a haggard look amidst their feverish restlessness.

On seeing me, she held out her hand with a studied smile which I recognised as of old.

“Ah! the world, then, has not quite forgotten me,” said she. “You were anxious to behold me once more, dear Mr. Raymond. Fanny, place a chair for Mr. Raymond.”

After having obeyed with a scowl, Fanny retired to the foot of the bed and lent forwards on her elbow. I looked at her, but she would not understand my meaning. I then turned towards Madame de Lourière.

“Are the services of your maid Fanny necessary to you, dear madam?”

“Not at all.”

“Then I should be greatly annoyed for her to remain on my account; may she not resume her avocations?”

“But if madam should have occasion for me?” objected the servant.

“I will give you notice,” I replied, pointing to the bell which stood near the bed on a little tray.

She darted a viper's glance at me and slowly retired, leaving the door ajar.

Madame de Lourière leaned forwards out of bed.

"Is she gone?" she demanded, in a whisper.

I replied that she was.

"Ah! how much I thank you!" resumed she, with a sigh of relief. "I was afraid lest she would remain here and prevent me from speaking to you. . . . But I beseech you shut the door; I am in constant terror of her listening."

"Are you, then, so dependent upon your servant?" I asked, after having done as she requested.

"Ah!" exclaimed she, "if you only knew all! People think she is my servant; she is in reality my jailer. Everything here depends upon her—daylight, air, food. I must obey her in everything. No communication reaches me from without but what she permits to pass. I have no power of resistance; I am like a living person enclosed in a coffin; every time I ask to be let out the wretch adds a nail!"

"But can you not discharge her?"

"Who would then take care of me? who would nurse me?" replied she, bitterly. "Where could I find now another attendant? No, no; I must submit to her, dear sir; I must retain her near me by dint of promises. Ah! you do not know what old age is!"

And, overcome at this thought, she wiped away two little tears which ran down her wrinkled cheeks.

In her exclusive consideration for herself, she had regarded neither my years nor my grey locks.

I sought to console her ; but she resumed, moving her head to and fro :

“ No one has any occasion for me, now ; weak and infirm, I am considered only as a burden or an annoyance ; hence all the world abandons me. The Chevalier himself — would you believe it ? — the Chevalier has ceased to come, because I can no longer make up his whist-party. During thirty years past I believed I had in him a friend : I had nothing more than a partner at cards.”

I could have replied only that, had she been the Chevalier, she would have acted just like him, and that such must be the result of every contract which has selfishness for its lawyer. I preserved, however, an embarrassed silence ; she breathed a sigh, and, raising her eyes to heaven, continued :

“ But, as for that, I ought to have expected nothing else ; it is the fate generally in store for over-sensitive souls. Never, dear sir, never have I been really loved ; my whole life has been passed in a world of ingratitude. But after my death at least I hope to be appreciated ; justice will then be done me. . . . The defenders of my memory will be those who will owe to me their happiness.”

She paused. I regarded her with a look of inquiry. After a while she continued :

"Yes, dear Mr. Raymond . . . I wrote down my last wishes . . . two months ago. For some time I have known that there is no longer any hope . . . notwithstanding the assurances of the doctor. . . . You yourself, no doubt, observed this when you first came in . . . you will acknowledge that you found me greatly changed . . . that you did not believe I was so ill?"

She looked at me with fixed and burning eyes, as if to implore me to contradict her. I asserted indeed the contrary, but in a less decided tone than I could have wished. Truth choked my utterance; she understood it, and cried out:

"No, no; do not try to deceive me . . . I shall not believe you . . . I feel too surely that my powers are declining. . . . But what does it signify? . . . I have lived long enough . . . not to . . . fear . . . death! . . ."

This last word struggled forth almost inaudibly from between her lips. A frightful lividness had replaced her pallor. I heard her teeth chatter, and her hands grasped convulsively at the bed-clothes, whilst, with her head thrown back and her eyes glaring with terror, she seemed fascinated at the brink of some invisible abyss.

I strove to reassure her by deelaring that the precautions her prudence had suggested, far from indicating the end as near, ought to tranquillise her mind, and leave her henceforth solely occupied with the means of recovery. She eagerly caught at this vague

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hope, and began to enumerate, with the most gratified precision, all the favourable symptoms which indicated a possible cure. She even made an attempt to raise herself in bed, in order to show me that she was stronger than I might have supposed.

Yet, after all, something within whispered the reverse. I saw her countenance suddenly change, and a shudder pass over her. She closed her eyes for an instant, as if to shut out some death-like phantom. At length she resumed, in a very low tone :

“ It does not matter . . . whatever may happen . . . I wished to see you, to consult you about this will . . . to learn if it is all in proper form . . . to confide it to your hands.”

I expressed myself as touched by this mark of confidence, but added that others had no doubt greater interests at stake in it; and I suggested to her the claims of relatives or old friends.

“ Do not speak to me of them,” she exclaimed, interrupting me; “ they have all neglected me, because they expect nothing from me . . . I, in my turn, want nothing of them . . . I confide in you.”

I bowed; she then felt about under her pillow, and handed me a key, pointing to the desk which I was to open with it, and then to the drawer where I found the will. She unfolded it herself, and gave it to me with a trembling hand.

“ Read !” said she, in a half-solemn, half-sentimental tone.

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I took the paper and read, almost in a whisper, as follows :

" I, the undersigned, declare what is written below to be the expression of my last wishes.

" 1st. Desirous of bequeathing a legacy which shall testify to my sympathy with orphans, I direct that one-third of what I possess shall be devoted to the education of the foundling, who shall be proved to have been born in this department at the moment nearest to that of my death; and that this child shall receive one of the donor's names.

" 2nd. To encourage marriages of affection, I leave a third of my fortune to form a dowry for some poor young girl of this department, bearing the name of Marie, who is about to marry for love.

" 3rd. In the hope of reinspiring sentiments too much attacked in our day, I direct a third of my property to be invested in Government securities, and the interest to be bestowed, as an annual prize, on the author of the best piece of poetry on the claims of family.

" The existence of these prizes, under the name of ' De Lourière's Prizes,' to be published in every possible way, so that candidates may be obtained from all quarters.

" Signed, this 12th day of October, 18—, of my own free will,

" MARIE ANATOLIE MALVINA DE LOURIERE."

Up to the very last line I had hoped that her nephew would not have been completely forgotten ; on reaching the signature, I permitted an exclamation of surprise to escape me, and returned the will.

"What is it?" demanded the sick woman, looking at me with a troubled countenance. "Is there anything wanting to make the will valid?"

"As to its validity, I think not," replied I ; "but as to its justice?"

"What do you mean?"

"I expected to find a codicil recognising the claims of your sister's son."

She trembled.

"Of Armand!" exclaimed she, her eyes flashing fire. "Is it Armand whom you mean? Do not speak to me of him! There is nothing in common between us; I know him no more."

"What, then, have you to reproach him with?" I asked, quietly.

She raised her cadaverous head ; a yellow film passed over her glassy eyes.

"What have I to reproach him with?" cried she, in a croaking voice. "Do you wish to know? First of all, then, his birth!"

And, as I looked at her with an air of surprise :

"Yes, his birth!" she continued, with increasing bitterness. "Have you forgotten the degrading marriage of his mother? A Dumont to marry a village grocer—a man of no account, a beggar!"

I tried to interpose that it was a marriage of inclination.

"Say a disgrace to the family," exclaimed Madame de Louri  re, "for which God has punished her; she died as she deserved—alone and wretched, leaving a son without a penny!"

"But that son," I began . . .

She did not suffer me to continue.

"That son," cried she, "has followed the example of his mother. Instead of embarking, for the honour of our name, as a sailor on board some ship, and going off, never to return, he has suffered himself to be adopted by a relative of his father!—a rustic without education!—exposing me thus to hear remarks from all the world that I have abandoned him . . . that I am a hard-hearted relative! for people have said so, Mr. Raymond. I have been accused of having done nothing for him, after offering to pay for his journey to Brest, and to send him out to the colonies! But no, he preferred to remain here—to enter the national schools with the lowest children. I could hardly ever go out without encountering him, dressed in an old blouse patched at the elbow, with a woollen cap on his head, like a peasant's child! Still worse, he had the impertinence to recognise me! Yes, sir, would you believe it, the little *wretch* never passed me without a bow and a 'Good morning, aunt'?"

And, as if she could not support the recollection, she extended her hand for the ether-bottle, and began

to inhale the vapour. I tried to restrain my indignation and feelings of disgust.

"Well, madam," I interposed, "but since the woollen cap and the blouse have disappeared, your nephew need no longer disgrace any one."

"Oh yes! [you are perfectly right there," replied she, ironically. "I think I have heard it said that Mr. Armand has become somebody! He teaches Latin and Greek, I believe, to little brats."

"He himself could have informed you, if allowed to do so, for he has called several times to see you."

"Say to calculate how long he had still to wait for my property."

"Madam. . . ."

"I am sure of it," she continued, bitterly; "and you yourself, sir—come, you whose frankness is a proverb, would you venture to assert that he came here through any sympathy for me, that he loves me sincerely, that my death will cause him intense grief?"

There were in the tones of Madame de Lourière an indescribable irony and a spirit of provocation which I could not endure.

"Good Heavens! madam," cried I, "I am not in the habit of exaggerating; a nephew who has always been kept at a distance, cannot entertain towards you the sentiments which he would have had for a relative, in whom he had found a second mother."

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"In other words, you accuse me of not having acted that part towards him?"

"I accuse not, madam, I defend; and I assert that, if in coming to you, your nephew did not bring the devoted love of a son, he did not yield, I am convinced, to an unworthy anticipation of his inheritance."

"In that case, it is all for the best," observed she, in a mocking tone.

My patience was exhausted.

"No! it is not all for the best, madam, replied I, raising my voice, "since you punish this young man for faults the existence of which is even questionable, and the responsibility of which, at all events, does not rest on him. This will professes to show your pity for deserted children. Is not your nephew an orphan? You establish a prize for the composition of verses about family duties; do better, madam, leave a good example by fulfilling them yourself. You desire, lastly, to bequeath a dowry for a young girl marrying from affection. Well! there is one now who loves Armand, and whose happiness you may ensure."

"Who told you that?" interrupted Madame de Louriére.

"His uncle himself."

"So then you have seen him?"

"The day before yesterday."

She clapped her skeleton hands together.

" Ah ! I see it all now," cried she, with a sardonic laugh ; " it's they who have sent you ; you are their lawyer. Fool that I am ! I thought your card was a token of old acquaintanceship and of sympathy ; it was only a snare ! Give me back my will, sir ; give it me back ! Oh, how wretched I am to have no one in whom to confide, no one in the world who loves me !"

She snatched the will from my hands ; I could contain myself no longer.

" And whom, then, have you loved yourself ?" replied I, rising ; " I am not sent here by your nephew, but if a stranger were sent, what would you have to complain of ? Has Armand any reason to interest himself about you ? The love of our children is like an income derivable from the funds : in order that they should pay it, we must have laid up in their hearts a capital of tenderness. Submit to the law that you have yourself created, in being no more than a stranger to him now. Woe, madam, to the old, who have not learned how to attach a single person to them by devotion on their part ; to relatives whose life is less a source of happiness than their death. . . .!"

" And I am one of the latter, am I not ?" cried she. " Then why speak to me of sister, of nephew, of bride with dowry ? No one loves me ; I know it—I know it. Well, I too will love no one ! This will is in due form ; you told me that yourself just now. I will hand it to the notary. . . . Let him be sent for

to-day—this minute!” She seized the bell from the little table by her side and shook it violently. “Ah! ah! ah! This is my vengeance: friends, relatives, servants, all have reckoned on my property; all shall be deceived. Nothing for the Chevalier—nothing for my nephew—nothing for Fanny.”

An exclamation from the servant, who had just entered by the side-door, interrupted her. Madame de Louriére, taken by surprise, hurriedly concealed the papers she had snatched from me, under the bed-clothes. Fanny rudely pulled aside the curtain and disclosed her features. The mask of gentleness which she habitually wore seemed suddenly to have fallen off; her eyes darted fire, and all the muscles of her face twitched convulsively.

“ Hide nothing away from me, I saw it . . .” cried she; “it is madam’s will, and, in spite of what she has declared to me day after day, I am to be left nothing!”

“ What does she mean?” stammered the dying woman. . . .

“ Ah! madam need not attempt to deceive me again,” cried the servant, in a passion; “I heard it all myself just now: ‘Nothing for Fanny!’ and yet every night I passed with her, madam made me fresh promises; she has kept me here when I could have earned better wages elsewhere; she has robbed me of my time and of my health!”

“ Listen to me!”

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" It is of no use now. 'Nothing for Fanny !' you said so yourself. Well, then, nothing for madam ! Let her find some one else to nurse and watch over her."

" But I tell you again . . . ."

" Tell me nothing," interrupted the girl, whose disappointment was turning into rage ; " let madam take back what belongs to her. There—there—there !"

And she threw on the bed of the dying woman her apron, her bunch of keys, her little housekeeping-book, and the physician's last prescription.

I tried in vain to interpose. Fanny's anger increased as she recalled the solemn promises made by her mistress ; mentioning the days, the places, the attendant circumstances. The sufferer could not support the contest ; I saw her fall backwards with her arms rigid and her eyes closed. I thought she was dying ; but after a short spasm consciousness returned ; her eyelids opened ; she looked around her. I was about to ring for the servant, who had left the room like a hurricane, but Madame de Lourièrre restrained me by a gesture.

" Do not recall her," murmured she, trembling nervously. . . . " I will not see her again."

" Suffer me at least to go and seek for some one."

" No—no !" stammered she, making an effort to retain me—" for mercy . . . for pity's sake ! . . . in the name of all that you have loved . . . leave me

not alone . . . here . . . with her . . . I am afraid of her . . . I am afraid of her !”

There was in her face and in the tone of her voice such an expression of horror, that I was seized with pity. I reseated myself near the dying woman’s bed, trying to reassure her, but her uncontrollable fears prevented her from listening. To all my assurances she answered by the same entreaties, each moment uttered more incoherently. A sort of convulsive rattle choked her voice, livid streaks appeared on her cheeks, and her dishevelled head-dress fell down in tangled ringlets mingled with her grey hairs.

I rose up, looking in vain for some means of restoring her. The side-table was covered with labelled phials, of the contents of which I was ignorant. All my inquiries about them elicited no other response than gasping and unintelligible exclamations.

I felt Madame de Louriére’s hand, which had grasped one of mine, become moist with a cold perspiration; her lips were held half distended by the metallic spring belonging to her false teeth, which she had no longer the force left to close, and her eyelids trembled in a last struggle against the eternal sleep.

Seized with sudden apprehension, I looked round and cried out for help. The door opened at the same instant, and the doctor appeared.

“ Ah ! doctor,” cried I, “ you are wanted here.”

He approached the bed, examined the sufferer, felt her pulse, and then, taking me aside :

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"Has there not been a crisis here?" demanded he, in a low voice.

I shortly recounted to him what had passed, expressing, at the same time, my fears that the shock must have aggravated the malady.

"Impossible," said he, shaking his head; "her hours were already numbered; the final struggle will commence to-day or to-morrow."

"But can nothing be done at least to mitigate her sufferings?"

"Very little; I will, however, try."

He went to the table and wrote a prescription.

"This is for the chemist."

"I will take charge of it."

"Is Madame de Lourière left quite alone?"

"As you see."

"Then a regular nurse must be summoned."

"Yes, and without delay."

He gave me the address of one, and I left the house.

A quarter of an hour afterwards the nurse and the medicine arrived at the residence of the dying woman.

I returned there myself in the evening, and found that, contrary to all expectation, she had regained a little strength and had just asked for the priest. I nourished a faint hope that the last counsels of religion might yet soften that stony heart.

The following day the death-struggle continued. The doctor, who felt satisfied that he could be of

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no use, had not returned. Towards evening I called again. The nurse had now quitted the sufferer, who, said she, had no longer need of any one's assistance to come to her end. She was chatting quietly on the door-step with the neighbours. On presenting myself once more, the following morning, I found the street door wide open. Madame de Louri  re had died in the night, and the magistrate, having been summoned, was about to affix his seals to the property.

On the first floor I encountered his officers performing their duties; on the second, the undertaker's people were taking the measure for the coffin. Heavy footsteps, loud talking, and laughter resounded everywhere, as in a house just previous to a sale.

I penetrated into the chamber of the dead. The nurse was preparing her coffee near the bed, the curtains of which were drawn close.

I opened them gently and saw the dead woman wrapped in her winding-sheet. She was lying there indifferent to all things, and forgotten even before her burial. Her heart had ceased to beat, without another heart being wounded in consequence. She was gone, without leaving a void in a single human breast. Little did it concern those who survived her, to know whether she was beneath the sky or under the earth. Her very life had been a tomb, on which selfishness had engraved the epitaph of every sentiment of devotion and of every affection.

## CHAPTER XVII.

G R A N D F A T H E R .

RENE and Félicité are married. I have been to see the bride in her little shop where she has established herself. I found her enchanted, bustling about, and smiling at every new comer. I begin to think that her spirit of order and her good nature will suffice to ensure her success. The customers from the neighbourhood seem much pleased to find everything so nicely arranged on the shelves, and that kindly good-humoured face behind the counter. After all, it may very possibly turn out that my fears were misplaced, and that the humble establishment, instead of ending in misery, may slowly enter upon a prosperous career.

For the most part, we studious men do not very clearly comprehend people who are simply practical; when called upon to classify them, we always start from our own individuality; we imagine that every

one ought to resemble ourselves ; we estimate the intelligence of our cook by his style of penmanship.

It is very rare that men are able to escape from the thraldom of their individual predilections, so as to throw themselves into the midst of the world of realities, and estimate individuals according to their aptitude for satisfying those realities. We all resemble M. Vestris more or less, who was astonished to hear that one of his old pupils, whom he could never teach to dance the gavotte, had become a great statesman. It seems as if each of us were inclined to set up his own habits and occupations as the standard measure of human capacity ; hence the indignation which we see manifested when one of your vulgar practical men acquires fortune or influence. With what profound contempt we point the finger at such upstarts of action ! what protestations there are against the state of society, when the grocer at the corner grows wealthy more surely and more rapidly than the artist, the professor, or the author ! As if society lived only upon books, problems, or statues, and had not above all things need of the journeymen of life !—as if the most favoured by nature ought also to be the most favoured by man, and to find themselves fortunate here below, as kings are powerful “by the grace of God !”

How is it we do not perceive that this world is a vast machine produced by a superhuman hand, which has given to each part a duty and not a privilege ?

Wherefore should the proud wheels, which serve to regulate the motion, cast reproaches at the thousand steel cranks destined to receive it, or at the bronze which adorns them, and the oil which facilitates their efforts?

I left Félicité's little shop satisfied respecting her future and Réné's, and already anticipating for them prosperity in years to come. Who can tell but that a family may proceed from this humble pair which some day will succour mine? In the vast ebb and flow of modern society such events have nothing extraordinary in them, and, I dare add, nothing unjust; for they extend to the general organisation of mankind that activity which the Creator has introduced into the separate organisation of individuals. In conferring hereditary privileges on particular classes, society substitutes an artificial rule for the Divine law; on the other hand, in making use of the most capable and the most energetic, she obeys that law, and acquires new vigour in accordance with the plans of God himself. Advance, then, children of the valet and the poor servant, become the masters of those who shall descend from me; and, if you are really the more worthy, I thank God and man for it in anticipation.

My daughter wrote to me lately that, as an opportunity offered, she should not wait for the holidays to send Blanche and Henry to me; but as it depended

upon the person who was to take charge of them, she could not name beforehand the exact day of their arrival.

This morning I heard all of a sudden in the hall the fresh voices of two children ; the door opened, and a little girl advanced smiling, with a boy about a year younger than herself peeping from behind her ; I divined at once who they were ; my heart beat faster, but I waited in expectation.

The little girl came towards me somewhat timidly, and said :

“ Here we are, grandpapa !”

I opened my arms, and both the children ran forward to embrace me.

Their conductor stood in the hall where he could observe our affectionate greetings. At length he determined on entering, when he gave me the best account of them both, and after the warmest expression of thanks on my part, he retired.

Well, at last, then, I behold them, these dear blossoms from a stalk almost dried up. There they stand before me in all the verdure of their spring growth ; I hold Blanche on my right side, Henry on my left, and press them thus against my bosom, with their sweet faces turned towards me, and their breath fanning my cheeks.

I scan their features in order to discover that family likeness which is, as it were, the everlasting re-birth

of the old who die in the young who survive. Both of them, no doubt, very soon felt how dear they were to me, for they grew familiar at once. Blanche leaned her curly head on my shoulder, whilst Henry played with the seals of my watch; then they began to chatter away freely. In one hour I had read through those young hearts where there was nothing for concealment.

Blanche, who is the elder, already assumes the character of protectress and counsellor; she admonishes Henry, she aids and excuses him. The sister from afar plays the part of mother. Henry, more ardent, rushes forward at a venture on every new path, but returns at the voice of Blanche; cries out to her, "I am here, fear nothing!" and starts off again. The boy is striving to become the man.

Our renewed acquaintance being thus made, I presented them both to Mr. Baptiste, who saluted them with his customary formal bow; I explained that he would treat them just as they treated him, and Mr. Baptiste confirmed my words. The two children looked at his grave face with some wonderment, and hardly knew if they ought to feel afraid or the reverse; but habit will set all right; the birds soon grow bold enough to build their nests in the sombrest trees. . . .

I was sure of it; Blanche, Henry, and Mr. Baptiste live very comfortably together, although a little cere-

moniously. Father Labat relates that, in his time, when the Spanish soldiers relieved guard, they bowed to each other before exchanging the password, and asked most politely after each other's welfare. I am witness every morning to a similar spectacle, when for the first time the children and Mr. Baptiste encounter each other.

After all, I like these acts of politeness even when carried to excess ; they habituate us to respect others, and to maintain dominion over ourselves. It is said that politeness is the make-pretence for real kindness of heart, in which case rudeness must be the make-pretence for aversion ; now, mask for mask, I prefer that which smiles on me to that which inspires disgust. There is, besides, something more in politeness than the mere appearance ; it is, as its name indicates, a certain *polish* in our habits and manners, thanks to which the spring-wheels of life meet together without abrasion.

So everything goes on at home wonderfully well ; no quarrels, no complaints. The house has resumed its former bustle ; here on the chimney-piece is some crochet-work just begun ; the piano is again heard ; the merry laughter of children has interrupted the staid silence of old age and the widower's home ; I hear little feet running about the empty and long deserted rooms, and I repeat half aloud the sweet lines of a poet whom I have the happiness to understand, although he lived before my era :

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Preserve me, Lord, preserve my kindred and my friends,  
And even those whose bitter hatred condescends  
To mock at my distress.  
From ever seeing, Lord, the summer without flowers,  
The cage without a bird, the blyes all empty in the bowers,  
The home no children bless!

Twenty times a day Blanche or Henry just opens the door of the little room which I occupy, peeps in, and says, softly :

“ Are you busy, grandpapa ? ”

I turn towards them with a smile, and beckon them in. One of the advantages at my time of life, as I have already explained, is that I am always at leisure to give audience to joy. Blanche, after kissing me, remains most frequently leaning against my shoulder without speaking ; it is evident that she has come simply to be near me—not to be alone—to feel herself beloved ; whereas Henry stands forward and questions me ; he, for his part, begins to observe and wishes to acquire information. I yield, and reply to his questions, I return his sister’s caresses, I am all things to them both, without objection, and without reserve. My tenderness is restrained by no scruples, for I have not, in their case, as formerly with my own son and daughter, the responsibility of their education. Withdrawn from action, the grandfather has not time left to undertake such duties ; he is in the vacation of life, and has the privilege of asking children only for their smiles and their kisses. Let others, in their turn, watch over the class with eye

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severe, he resembles henceforth only the ancient tree, which yields a grateful shade for the hours of recreation.

Sweet and tender privilege ! Old age thus relieves us of a weight of responsibility. Whilst others, with the balance of justice in their hands, estimate the quality of actions and redress wrongs, we, elevated into the serene sphere which separates the two worlds, join the rank of those princes to whom a constitutional fiction has left only the prerogative of mercy ; we reign, but we do not govern !

Henry did not wish entirely to suspend his course of study ; he works daily for some hours, and one of these mornings he brought me the Eclogues of Virgil, begging me to translate for him two lines which he could not understand.

My explanation no doubt satisfied him, for he shortly returned with the history of Justinian, and then with one of Cicero's essays. Insensibly our consultations merged into a veritable course of instruction, and now for three days past I have become an improvised teacher, turning over once more the leaves of my school-day authors.

I can hardly describe the effect they have had upon me ! My memory rushes back across their metaphors and their trains of thought, like a wanderer returning again to his native place after an absence of half a century. I recollect myself by degrees ; a thousand images return ; I hear again the tones once so familiar. The

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history of my childhood rises up, chapter by chapter, between the pages of these old volumes. I see myself again at the farther end of the dark schoolroom, with its wooden benches, and tables smeared with ink. I hear the monotonous voice of our schoolmaster in his college-gown, as he murmurs from behind the shadow of his desk. Two long lines of pupils stand there, ranged against the wall ; I recognise their features one after the other, and my thoughts involuntarily follow them into the busy world beyond, where I rapidly survey their histories, now, alas ! for the most part brought to a close.

But there is one face, above all the rest, especially impressed upon my mind, which this volume of the Eclogues has recalled. In turning over the last pages, I caught sight, on the pasteboard cover, of a name almost obliterated. It is that of my first schoolboy companion, of that school-mate with whom one shares everything—hopes, blows, jealousies, and pots of preserve. Cherished for his sake, and transferred successively from my son to my grandson, this book seems brought back before my eyes, to reproach me with my long forgetfulness of its first master.

I fancy, indeed, that I see him again crossing our playground for the first time, led by his mother—a poor woman with pale face and stooping shoulders, clad in widow's mourning. Although he was even then tall, he held her hand from the still remaining habit of infancy, and we, who had interrupted our

games to look at the “new boy,” exchanged derisive smiles. Observing the care bestowed, down to the minutest details, on the dress of our new schoolfellow, the elegance of his manner, and the solicitude visible in every movement of his mother, who seemed to guard him as a treasure, the scapegrace of our division cried out, “Oh, here comes the Dauphin!”\* and he was never known amongst us by any other name afterwards.

But the spirit of raillery which had thus maliciously christened him, after the manner of the wicked fairies in the story-book, was destined to fail like them. The natural goodness of the lad vanquished his evil godmother; the nickname intended to make him ridiculous, clung to him indeed, but harmlessly, and his gentleness ended in drawing from the sarcasm its sting.

Poor Dauphin! how well he knew how to atone to us for his respect towards his masters, by complaisance towards his schoolfellows. When at times the recollection of his mother came upon him too forcibly, and he went down to walk by himself in the shadow of the high wall which enclosed our grounds, how at the first summons he dried his moistened cheek! how he ran up, smiling and eager, to join in the first game proposed!

But then what attention he displayed at the class when the tutor spoke! What devotion to study!

\* The title of the heir-apparent to the French throne under the monarchy.

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There was not a single slip of memory, not a single case of negligence, not a solitary lie ! At the end of each half year he carried off all the prizes, and none of us thought of envying him, so well he seemed to have deserved them ; we said : " They are for the Dauphin ;" as we might have said : " The rivers are for the ocean."

He himself displayed neither ambition nor vanity, but the desire only of gratifying his mother ; it was she alone whom they virtually crowned on his brow. Every year she was present at the distribution of prizes, dressed in the same mourning habits. She and her son had become the greatest objects of interest and pride on these occasions ; the school, in fact, had adopted them both. When the celebration was over, the Dauphin left us, loaded with books and chaplets, and sustaining on one arm the widow trembling with happiness : every eye followed them ; we loved them for so loving each other.

Six years passed thus ; the end of the last term approached, and at the same time the period of our separation. My school-mate never spoke of it, but he redoubled his efforts ; it was evident that he wished his leaving school might be for his mother the end of all her trials. To accomplish his purpose, it was necessary that he should pass with sufficient distinction to ensure a career being at once opened to him ; hopes of this had already been held out, and in order to merit it, he no longer joined us during the hours of

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recreation ; he prolonged his studies into the middle of the night, he resumed them with the first rays of the sun.

One day, however, he did not come down-stairs. We went to inquire for him. He was not able to leave his bed, where he lay suffering from an attack of fever. Our doctor had already paid his morning visit, and he was not again sent for that day ; we waited in the hope that a little repose would be all that was necessary for the invalid ; but by the evening his cheeks were deep scarlet, his breath burning hot, and his eyes sparkling ; the next day he no longer recognised us.

Every care was now lavished on him, but in vain. The delirium of the Dauphin only increased ; he fancied himself before his tutors, and repeated aloud the recent lessons he had learned. At certain moments his memory failed him, when his features would contract, his hand press convulsively against his forehead, his eyes assume a fixed and agonised expression of doubt ; then by an effort of will which seemed to survive in him, he recovered the lost thread, and began his interrupted recitations once more.

At other times he fancied himself to be undergoing some important examination which was to decide his fate : he replied to imaginary questions, and translated aloud the required passages, commenting on them with painful hesitation. His school-

fellows came one after the other to his bedside, and retired, bowing their heads, and with troubled hearts ; all hope was evidently gone.

I had obtained leave not to quit my companion's side, and watched the rapid progress of that delirious attack. Soon his vital powers declined, and the sufferer lay still ; he repeated now indistinctly and with enfeebled voice some lines of Virgil, whose writings he was particularly fond of. It appeared to me as if all the rest—poets, orators, historians—had deserted the dying boy, and the peasant of Mantua alone remained, breathing into his ear some melodious fragments of his verse, like a mother singing her child to sleep. In the ebb and flow of the wandering thoughts which passed through his agonised brain, each muttered line seemed an allusion, or a passing souvenir. Sometimes a sweet scene of his childhood welled up in that final dream, and he repeated quite low :

Alter ab undecimo tam me jam ceperat annus,  
Jam fragiles potuam a terrâ contingere ramos.\*

Then a tenderer recollection succeeded, a gentle face passed vaguely before his half-closed eyes, his lips just gave trembling utterance to the well-known line :

Incipe parve puer, risu cognoscere matrem.†

\* I was just entering my twelfth year, and was able now to reach with my fingers the fragile branches.

† Begin, little one, to recognise thy mother with a smile.

And as I bent over him in the effort gently to impose silence, he resumed in a louder tone :

Cantantes licet usque (minus via lœdat) eamus.\*

But almost immediately afterwards seized with sudden weakness, he re-closed his heavy eyelids, and his voice died away, whispering the poet's farewell :

Surgamus ; solet esse gravis cantantibus umbra.†

These were the last words I could distinguish. The sufferer relapsed afterwards into that convulsive drowsiness which precedes the final separation ; another night passed, but the following morning his breathing insensibly grew fainter and fainter, and when the doctor came, all was over.

The entire college followed the corpse to its final abode. It was the first time I had seen any one put into the earth whose hands I had clasped—whom I had known full of life like myself. The smallest details are still present to my mind. The day was bright and cold ; the fields recently ploughed, and streaked with snow, had the appearance of an immense black pall fringed with white tassels ; the priests walked in front chanting the funeral service ; between each verse there was a pause, and then the only sounds heard were those made by our footsteps on the frozen snow. At length we reached the cemetery.

\* Let us go forward singing ; songs shorten the way.

† Let us arise ; the mists are fatal to those who sing.

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The coffin was laid beside the grave, and whilst the gravediggers consulted together in a low voice, there was rather a long interval in the service. I looked into the dark pit where the companion of my studies and my sports was about to disappear ; a little bird suffering from the cold chirped plaintively a few yards off on the leafless branch of a weeping willow. As far as my eyes wandered I could see only graves half buried under the snow, or leaning crosses from which icicles hung down like falling tears ; until then I had remained firm ; but that mingling of cold, sorrow, and death, made me shudder ; I felt my heart swell, and hurried back to join the ranks behind. The noise of the coffin, as it struck the sides of the grave in its descent, made me return in spite of myself ; I heard the earth rattling down, and saw the bearers draw out the ropes which creaked under the weight of the coffin ; then the priests raised their voices again, the last benediction was spoken over the departed, and the gravediggers began to shovel in the earth upon the coffin, whilst we passed round the opening one after the other.

At the moment of my reaching the grave-side, one end of the coffin only was visible ; it seemed to me, on looking down into the grave, as if the dead had made an effort within the oaken envelope to rise from his funeral bed. I gave a start, and in the agitation my foot stumbled ; I should have fallen into the pit, still only partly filled up, but for an arm which held me back. It was that of our excellent master.

“Take care!” said he, with mournful tenderness; “one is enough, and more than we can spare!”

Then, turning towards the coffin, which had now nearly disappeared, he slowly uncovered his grey head, and addressed to him whom we were never to see again, in the language he knew so well, the exclamation of the gladiators in the imperial Circus:

Morituri te salutant.\*

The following days were full of sadness. When the Dauphin was with us, few thought about him; but now he had disappeared, all eyes seemed to seek his form. His single unoccupied seat attracted more attention, than all the other seats with their occupants put together.

I especially could not reconcile myself to his absence —it took very many days to accomplish that; at last, Time performed his usual office. Nearly a month had passed; a new comer occupied the place of the departed, we had all resumed our usual habits, when one day, during our play-hour which followed dinner, a few words passed rapidly from the nearest boy to his next companion, and pronounced only in a whisper, startled us like a sudden cry:

“The mother of the Dauphin! The mother of the Dauphin!”

All our games were stopped, and every eye was

\* Those about to die, salute thee!

turned in the same direction. The widow crossed our playground, clad as usual in mourning, but paler and more bent down. Behind her walked the college porter carrying all her son's relics : his books, his violin, and some portfolios filled with his manuscripts. The poor woman turned round each moment to look at her mournful treasures, afraid lest she might still lose them. As she passed near us she paused, her eyes wandered down our ranks as if hoping to discover some more vivid traces of her son ; she seemed to look for what could best recall him to her, to seek the spots where he was accustomed to wander, those amongst us who were his favourites.

At one moment I thought she was about to speak to us, she had made a step towards the group where I was standing, but the effort was doubtless too great ; she turned away suddenly, drew down her black veil, and rapidly crossed the court.

We followed her with our eyes until she was lost in the distance, then looked at each other, and separated without saying a word.

Alas ! a few years before we had all seen her cross the same spot, holding in her hand the boy whom she had only weaned from her bosom, to nourish with her tenderness ; we had seen her return on six anniversaries to rejoice in his triumph. Too confiding mother, she had lavished on the college the fruit of her sufferings and watchings, her past sacrifices and

her future hopes, and the college gave her back only a few books without a master, and the inscription on a tomb.

This incident, which recurred to me on taking up the familiar volume of Virgil, and turning over its leaves with my grandson, led me to reflect on my own history. I thought that I, too, might have died just when the difficulties of early study had terminated, and the period of action was about to commence. Poets no doubt might have envied my falling thus asleep in the morning of life, with my hands full of flowers, and revelling in all the illusions of youth; sweet and attractive end! But I, O my God! who have ever regarded Thy creation with love, I give Thee thanks for having prolonged my life to derive enjoyment from it. Let others be enamoured of death, I bless Thee for length of life. I bless Thee also that Thou hast enabled me equally to experience the enchantments of youth, the throes of temptation, and the calm joy of victory in the fulfilment of duty. To die at the commencement of existence is to stop at the very threshold of our journey with pilgrim-staff in hand. Others pass onward with songs; they talk of mighty rivers, of marvellous cities, of smiling countries before them, but as for us, a fatal hand draws us back; a voice says to us: "These thou shalt never see." I myself, however, have seen them; I have perused all the stanzas of that epic poem of which so many others know but the preface; I have followed my course

here below even to the goal, forcing myself to brave in turn the rain and the sunshine, and not to forget my life's purpose when enjoying grateful shelter ; so that I repeat sometimes to myself with humble satisfaction, the verses of a modern poet on the destiny of man :

Possessor of a field he holds on lease,  
 Weary, though strong from healthful plough and flail,  
 The peasant seeks his cottage in the vale ;  
 When night descends he falls asleep in peace.

Let us, too, ponder on the day's decline,  
 Thy labourers, O God ! sent here below  
 To reap the harvest difficult and slow  
 Which the soul yields—to be accounted thine.

Let us plough deep into the ungrateful soil ;  
 Sow seed that richly shall repay our toil ;  
 Far from the honest grain cast forth the thorn.

O, fellow-workers ! while day yet remains  
 Let us fulfil our task so full of pains,  
 That we may sweetly sleep until the eternal morn.\*

But is it true that the task is so full of pain ? Does the labourer of whom the poet speaks, really find in his work only weariness and vexation of spirit ? Has he not also the freshness of the dawn, the repose at noontide beneath his fruit-trees, the bread doubly enjoyed by the hedge-side in presence of his ripening harvest, and at the hour of his return home the women's songs mingled with the laughter of children ?

\* From a volume of Sonnets by Boulay-Paty, which received a prize from the French Academy.

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If his home is to-day lonely like mine, the recollections of youth may still dwell there—smiling sylphs, who in invisible circles sing around his hearth. No! no! God has not made life too burdensome for us to support; there is enough of gladness bestowed to lighten its duties; hence, when we shall appear before Him, let us not imagine that it will suffice to answer, like the man who, when asked what he had been doing during the great Revolution, replied, “Nothing; I have lived.”

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CLASSICS.

THE necessity of supplying Henry with the books required for his studies led me to explore a long neglected corner of my library. There I found all my old college classics; I began by turning over the leaves standing, and at first skipped ten pages at a time, then two, then passed the title-page only, then read everything, and as my attention was now fully engaged, I sat down.

Hour succeeded hour, night came; I lit my lamp and continued my occupation.

Next morning I rose earlier than usual to resume my reading; at length I formed a great resolution: no less than the determination to re-peruse all that ancient literature, neglected during fifty years for the sake of dry legal researches. Behold then my mind gone back to nurse with the Greeks and Romans.

Formerly when tempted by a work of high-class literature or of imagination, if I found myself interested, it was like Renaldo in the Palace of Armida—I was ashamed of my weakness, I read it by stealth ; each time the hour struck on my timepiece, I seemed to hear a summons and a reproach ; to-day all is changed : I am no longer a *prisoner within the circle of the hours* ; the world of thought spreads open for me its thousand paths where I may wander at leisure. I will then revisit those regions bright with flowers at every step, but without over-exerting myself, for time and space are at my disposal.

I no longer recognise my Greek and Latin authors, not even those from whom I can still quote long passages. In my schoolboy days I had committed their thoughts to memory, I had not mastered them.

And how could it be otherwise in that unloving study of the works of antiquity, when the wandering mind of the scholar skims the surface only, interrogates with the dictionary, and listens with the grammar ! Whilst his eyes follow the printed characters in order that his memory may retain the words, and his fingers write down the translation, he himself is mentally absent, wandering out there on the dusty road where the horseman is galloping ; or above in the clouds which assume the forms of his day-dreams ; or close at hand in the shady playground, where the housemaid is singing : do not, then, ask him to enter into the meaning of the thoughts which he trans-

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lates ; he is a somnambulist, without the consciousness of his own movements.

When I was at college, I recollect one of my fellow-students in the same class—a delightful dreamer who might have become a great poet, if necessity had not made him an indifferent lawyer—was translating at my side the fable of "*The Man and the Ant.*" When he came to the passage where the Latin author narrates the fall of the insect into a little fountain, *decidit in fonticulam*, the lad carelessly turned over the pages of his dictionary whilst his thoughts were busy elsewhere ; at length he found the word : *Fonticula*—diminutive . . . . .

He read no further, closed the dictionary, took his pen up with a yawn, and wrote down unhesitatingly that *the Ant fell into a diminutive*. On reading his translation aloud at the evening class, you can readily imagine what shouts of laughter followed ; the nickname of *Fonticula* was given to the translator by common consent, and stuck to him, although he never succeeded in making it glorious, like Tullius that of Cicero.\*

But of all those who rallied him on that occasion, who could have pronounced himself guiltless of a similar piece of stupidity ? Had we not all traversed that marvellous fairy-land of Greek and Latin art

\* Cicero is derived from "cicer," Latin for a vetch ; a small excrescence on the nose of Cicero is supposed by some to have given rise to this *cognomen*.

with the careless indifference of the child who, borne aloft amidst the sublimities of the Alps, is wholly absorbed in looking at a flower, or in chasing a butterfly? Sad fate of the chief works of antiquity predicted by Horace, who said, addressing his own productions: “After the fingers of the crowd shall have soiled your pages, you will descend into some decayed quarter of the town to moulder in the hands of a schoolmaster mumbling out rules of syntax to little brats of children.”

But the little *brats* are not singular in misconstruing those immortal pages. Later in life how many of their beauties still escape us. Every age reads with its special pre-occupations. What we look for in a book is far less the author than ourselves.

“Quote to me each day the verse that strikes you most in your favourite poet,” said a sage, “and I will tell you the history of your soul.”

But with experience the judgment enlarges, fresh points attract our attention; the sun of life seems slowly to rise higher in the heavens, and illuminate, each successive year, some corner in the sublime works of genius hitherto obscure to us. This, then, is the reason why the old man who has not immured himself in a tomb, perceives more clearly their full meaning, and distinguishes better each detail. Having seen everything, and experienced everything, there is no perspective beyond his ken; he realises within himself every emotion by the aid of memory; while

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every other age hears only one note of the grand chord, he has successively listened to all.

I experience this vividly, for my part, on taking possession again of the writers of antiquity. When a child, I saw in them, like Chrysalus playing at nine-pins with his great Plutarch, only intellectual productions, made out of the dictionary of Boudot and the grammar of Le Despautère. I sought in them *for the formation of tenses* and the *rules for the elision of the vowel!* To-day, I feel interested only in what they have to say to me; I follow their thoughts, I study their shades of character; they are no longer for me models of grammar, but rather a Senate, where the greatest poets, the most eloquent orators, the most dignified historians, and profound philosophers speak in turn, and enchant me.

To take the Greeks first. What elegance is there with all their force! What brightness in their fancy! What perfection in their candour! The literature of the Greeks resembled their architecture or statuary, the finest lineaments of which stood out sharply defined against a cloudless sky; everything was cut in marble, and the sun illumined the whole!

The Roman authors, again, are not equally spontaneous; their less brilliant atmosphere renders the outlines of their works somewhat confused: the production of art now is no longer the child entering the world by a sudden impulse, and perfect in its heavenly beauty, it is the result of labour often renewed, and

demanding effort. But how great the charm still ! What an abundant and ever-flowing spring of thought ! The Greek phrases sing, the Latin periods declaim. In the one case we have the youth of the intellect, with its lyric passion, its expansive growth, its superabundant gaiety ; in the other, the manhood, with its subdued poetry, its oratory of the forum, and its smile of prudence.

But what astonishes me in both is that choice selection of words, and that good taste in composition. Who, then, gave to these nations the leisure to fashion and polish their language ? Where was the illiterate class amongst a people whose greengrocers could recognise Theophrastus as a stranger, *because he spoke the language too purely ?* Behind the applauders of Sophocles, or the audience of Cicero, who was it that tilled the earth, cut and carved the stone, and forged the iron ?—Ask Spartacus.\*

\* A celebrated gladiator who organised and led a dangerous revolt of his own and kindred classes against Rome. He was defeated and slain b.c. 71.

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE COUNT DE ROVERE.

GOOD old Bouvier has been to speak to me about his nephew, who was disinherited by Madame de Lourière notwithstanding my efforts. The young man, it appears, has lost all present hope of making his suit agreeable to the family of his intended. If he really expects to win her some day, he must think of advancing himself. Continuing to vegetate on the income derived from a few lessons in the village he inhabits will lead to nothing ; he has determined to wait no longer for the good fortune which seems never to come, but to go forwards to its encounter. It required a long deliberation with himself to arrive at this result. While at home he would be near the object of his choice ; deprived of all hope of obtaining her hand, he would still have the pleasure of seeing her and speaking to her, but he feels that to dream away his time in that sweet intercourse would be to sacrifice the reality of happiness to its shadow.

Learning, therefore, that the Count de Rovère is in want of a tutor for his grandson, he has determined on applying for the post; but an introduction is necessary through some friend of the Count, and old Bouvier thought of me.

I know M. de Rovère but very slightly; my title, however, of ex-professor of law and my age give me certain claims; I can without false modesty feel assured that my recommendation will have some weight with him. I have decided, therefore, on seeing the Count.

He inhabits, in the centre of the town, an old mansion which stands within a court-yard. It is one of those structures built with no pretensions to style, which look old rather than antique; it has large windows, protected up to the first floor by iron bars, and in the upper stories by Venetian blinds; the broad doors are strengthened by large iron bolts, the court-yard is paved with little sharp stones, the flight of steps is of granite; no ornament, nothing green is visible; all is stiff and cold; you are seized with ennui on entering.

I knock at the outer gate (for at the Count's they are always on guard); an old man-servant answers the summons; he is spare, bewigged like a royal footman, and wears an old-fashioned suit of livery.

I ask for M. de Rovère, giving my name; the servitor bows, leads the way through the hall, opens another door, and announces me.

I enter an immense wainscoted saloon hung with red damask and panelled with grey woods, inlaid to represent groups of nosegays, lyres, and cupids, poorly designed ; the intermediate spaces between the panels are filled with long narrow mirrors ; couches and arm-chairs with lank legs complete the furniture ; the ceiling is ornamented with three small chandeliers provided with glass pendants.

On hearing my name, the Count rose and advanced to meet me.

He is an old gentleman who still wears waistcoats with deep pockets under his coat, cut in the French fashion, and breeches with buckles and silk stockings. He has the distinguished air of one accustomed to command, and that extreme politeness which forbids familiarity.

After allowing myself to be conducted by him to a chair, I perceived that the card-table was set out, and that several of M. de Rovère's habitual visitors were making up a whist-party.

There was first the old German abbess, whose whole life is taken up between her game of cards and her little dog Zephyr ; then the Chevalier, the author of a set of verses published a long time ago in the *Mercury*, and who, having taken the trouble to show a little talent once in his life, thinks that he may now repose until it is time to die. Farther on are the Count's two cousins, whose history is comprised in the fact of their having formed part of the Emigra-

tion ; the President's widow, who formerly stammered only, but is now, I find, deaf also ; lastly, the doctor, a spectre-like individual, whom one would suppose to be in mourning for all the patients he has attended.

I apologised for intruding upon this exalted company, and, taking the Count aside, explained to him in a few words the object of my visit.

His grandson, I understand, requires a tutor, and what I tell him of my protégé seems satisfactory ; but he assures me, with aristocratic nonchalance, that he is little acquainted with these matters, and that he confides in the discretion of M. the Abbé de Riol. I rise, saying that I will call on the abbé ; but M. de Rovère tells me that he is expected, and requests me to await his arrival. The hope of concluding the affair on the spot tempts me to remain, and I accept the invitation, on condition, however, that the Count will resume his game.

In order to leave him quite at liberty, I ask permission to sit by the fire, and, walking over to the fireplace at the other end of the room, commence turning over the pages of a book whilst the game is recommenced.

History generally ascribes the invention of cards to Charles the Sixth, whose madness it was thus sought to amuse. I thoroughly accept, for my part, this account of their origin. The sight of figures drawn on pasteboard and rudely coloured, with their unexpected evolutions and their sham battles, seems peculiarly well

adapted to occupy the thoughts of a madman or of children. I will even grant that they are made the pretext for regular assemblies, and are regarded as a relaxation from labour; but how can some people find such fascination in them as they do, and lose themselves, like the opium-eater in his drowsy intoxication? The Count and his partners have arrived at this point; the cards once taken up, all of them seem to forget the actual world, and to exist only for the tricks and turns of fortune which the game affords them. Absorbed in this puerile romance, they no longer see anything beyond. There is nothing here of the passion of the gambler who rushes after his prey ever flying before him, but rather, one would say, the mania of idle minds, systematically escaping from the fatigue of thought. In this company of men and women, who ought to have cultivated their ample leisure, and have turned to account the teachings of a long life, not a word was pronounced beyond what the game required. To look at those serious faces round the table strewn with little pieces of cardboard; to hear those monotonous voices dropping, at long intervals, a strange word which awakens no idea in the mind, one might have pronounced them some assembly of necromancers, risen from their tombs to renew their incantations. Only terror was wanting; these spectres wearied instead of frightening one.

The players themselves appeared to become more

and more absorbed, their eyes were fixed, their features rigid, their exclamations confused, their movements slow and mechanical; evidently their souls were fast asleep.

Either from contagion or the influence of the warmth, I felt in my turn a kind of torpor stealing through the veins; my eyelids began to droop, when the door quietly opened, and the footman appeared, bringing in a tray filled with glasses of eau sucrée.

He also seemed affected by the all-pervading influence; he advanced with a ghost-like step, and moved round the table, presenting the tray in silence, while no hand advanced to take anything; he then mechanically resumed his course towards the door. At the moment of his passing me I made an effort to shake off this magnetic drowsiness, and, stopping him, took a glass from the tray.

This unexpected act of vitality seemed to awaken the phantom footman. He fell back in surprise. The glass dropped out of my hand, and at the sound all the players turned round with an exclamation; I had broken the spell which lay heavy on the “castle of the sleeping beauty!”

I was at a loss to find an excuse for my awkwardness, when the opportune arrival of the Abbé de Riol relieved me from further embarrassment. The Count introduced me to him, mentioning at the same time the object of my visit, and I led the abbé into the recess of one of the bow-windows to explain everything to

him. He listened without making any reply, except a low *hum!* with which he followed all my remarks. The abbé was a regular visitor at the house, the drowsiness of which had evidently taken possession of him. He added only, out of respect to his sacred calling, an air of meditation to his rigidity. Mistaking his silence for hesitation, I returned at least ten times to the charge, repeating my praises of the young man, and enlarging on his intelligence and good character; at length, out of all patience, I asked the abbé, somewhat abruptly, if he really thought my protégé's services would be accepted. He gave a start, and seemed to recover from his intellectual nap.

"Well . . . I do not see . . . any objection," said he, fixing a vacant pair of eyes upon me. "You are, of course, aware that he must be prepared to start with the young Viscount for Italy?"

I did not know this, but replied that it would probably be no obstacle to his accepting the appointment.

"In that case, let him come and see me," added the abbé. "The Count is anxious to hasten his grandson's departure."

I ventured to ask if it was on account of his health that he was obliged to be thus exiled.

"His health cannot but gain by it," replied M. de Riol; "but the actual motive for his departure is, that the young Viscount is too energetic; he runs about, talks loudly, sings . . ."

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"And that disturbs M. de Rovère," I added ; "yes, yes, I comprehend it all."

I had in very truth done so. How, indeed, could the joyous activity of childhood be endured amidst these phantoms ? Its shouts of laughter troubled their dreamless sleep. Away from here, all who really live ! leave the dead in peace to play out their game of cards over their tombs.

I hastened to take leave and make my escape : the sepulchral atmosphere weighed heavily upon me ; I longed to find again in the open air thought, noise, and action.

It is, then, true that old age is itself sometimes disposed to hasten the footsteps of time ; that it withdraws from life before descending into the tomb ; that it refuses to imitate Cato, who desired to maintain his active course to the very last hour, to be extinguished only by burning down into the socket, and by the full enjoyment of life to arrive at maturity for death.

God preserve me from this species of suicide ! I pray to enjoy to the very last all that the Almighty has granted me here below ; to continue man until He shall have decreed me to become something else.

Life well fulfilled in its every phase is the best preparation for eternal repose. The poet Lucretius has said, in admirable verse : " If thy soul has not unworthily suffered the streams of happiness to escape thee as through a bottomless vase, retire, O well-filled guest,

contented from the feast of life !” Yes, *contented*; for to enjoy the blessings of this world is not necessarily to confine oneself to them. I can also look beyond the fleeting days, and aspire to unknown horizons; but, sure of my destination, why should I despise the beauties of the route and the comforts of the carriage which conveys me? My attachment to this world does not imply contempt for the next. I often repeat the words which Cicero puts into the mouth of his hero, in his *Dialogue on Old Age*: “The day of my death it will not be easy to retain me here below. I do not desire to be ‘recast,’ like Pelias; if some god thought of conferring on me a favour by proposing to me to recommence my journey from infancy, and to crawl about a second time in swaddling-clothes, I should refuse unhesitatingly. The race being run, I have no desire to be recalled from the goal to the starting-point. . . . Not that I affect to deprecate life, as certain philosophers have often done; I do not repent having lived, because I think I have lived so as not to have been born in vain; but I shall quit existence as an inn, and not as a dwelling-place. Nature has given man the material world that he may stay there awhile; she does not condemn him to remain for ever. O happy day! when I shall escape from the crowd and from the mire, to rejoin the celestial assembly, the divine senate of souls!”

## CHAPTER XX.

## SOLITUDE.

**Y**ESTERDAY, Henry and Blanche left me; the hour of separation was a bitter one. They had lived under my roof for six weeks, and I had grown so accustomed to their presence! Now all about me will again become silent and deserted.

Just before their departure I led them into the little parlour, where I had set out on a table, the things which appeared to have tempted them most during their too short visit; the workbox which my dear wife had used, some books, and a few drawings. I felt a longing for them to take all I possessed, as if in the hope that a portion of my soul might follow them, with the many objects with which it seemed united by the link of association. .

When at length we were to separate, Blanche burst into tears, repeated over and over again that she would return, and clung round my neck with endearing exclamations. Henry, who held my hand, was

more silent, but the change of his features showed me that it was by an effort only that he controlled his emotions. And now the parting moment had arrived, I led them to the coach, where the friend to whom I was to entrust them was waiting. Again we embraced amidst tears and promises ; then both took their places, the driver seized the reins, started his horses, and the pavement shook under the loaded diligence.

The two children continued looking out of the door behind as long as they could see me, waving their hands in token of adieu ; at length the conveyance suddenly turned a corner and disappeared : for an instant more I heard the sound of the wheels and the cracking of the whip, and then all was silent.

They were gone, and perhaps never to see me again, for each day added to my existence is now a delay of grace. At this thought my heart swelled almost to bursting with a thousand happy wishes.

“ Go, dear ones, who came to gladden my solitude, and who have crossed my declining path like a sweet ray of morn : may every blessing descend upon you ! health which gives a savour to life, peace which permits its enjoyment, the love of duty which serves as its polar star, resignation which blunts its sharpest arrow. O ! my beloved pair of swallows, who for a few weeks have suspended your nest beneath my roof, and rejoiced my fireside with your twitterings, may you traverse none but sunny skies, and meet everywhere on your way only spring ! ”

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While bidding them thus my adieu in thought, I slowly regained my house. The day had scarce begun, the town was not yet aroused, and I met in the silent streets only the surgeon hastening to attend some patient, and the milkwoman's little cart, the bells of which tinkled from afar through the frosty air.

I arrived at my own door greatly dejected. Mr. Baptiste was no doubt on the look-out for my return, for, before I rang, the door was opened. I entered my study, the fire was already lit, my arm-chair in its place, and the book which I had begun was laid out on the little reading-desk.

Shortly afterwards my friend Roger appeared ; he was aware of my grandchildren's departure, and came in to breakfast and keep me company. I was touched by this affectionate solicitude on the part of my servant and my old friend, and felt that, after all, I should not be left alone, and that I ought to think not on what I had lost, but on the friends that still remained to me.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## THE PARALYTIC.

**A**RMAND has been to thank me for having recommended him to M. de Rovère; he called last week on the abbé and was accepted, and in a few days he is to set out with the young Count.

Although he was anxious to obtain this appointment of tutor, the quitting home is evidently painful to him; he leaves behind him the young girl he loves, without being able to obtain any promise from her friends, and in ignorance of what will be the state of things on his return. I divined his distress from some words which escaped his lips; but I did not wish him to perceive it. To invite a more intimate confidence would have been to encourage him in his passion, and compel me in some measure to interfere; I dreaded, however, to accept a responsibility of which I could not estimate the gravity in advance, and to nourish hopes that might never be realised. I main-

tained, therefore, a prudent reserve, and contented myself with promising the young man to call again on the Abbé de Riol to settle the question of his salary, which he had not ventured to touch on himself. He then left me with the warmest expressions of gratitude, repeating that he owed his appointment to my recommendation ; M. de Rovère had told him so without reserve. It is then true that one who is aged, poor, and living in obscurity, may yet be a succour to some.

I have been to-day to take Armand the document containing the particulars of his engagement with the Count. He had given me the address of his godmother, with whom he is staying, but he was not at home. I ascended a winding staircase, the steps of which were rugged with hard knobs of dirt, while a piece of rope, polished by constant use, served for a banister ; the ascent was so difficult, that I was obliged to stop at each landing-place till I reached the fourth floor ; at length I found the apartment. On my knocking, a strange croaking voice muttered a few unintelligible words, I pressed down the latch, pushed the door open, and found myself in a large dimly-lighted room, the furniture of which was quite out of keeping with the situation, both in form and elegance. Some arm-chairs of damask silk in tolerably good preservation were standing between two antique beds with faded curtains ; massive wooden

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claws adorned the pedestals of a mahogany library table ornamented with gilt bronze-work. On the hearth was burning one of those intentionally miserable fires, so forcibly termed “widows’ fires” by the common people; and in front of the logs which burned slowly among the ashes, a large easy-chair had been rolled over, in which I at length distinguished a human form sitting motionless.

It was an old woman, doubtless the godmother of my young protégé, but so stricken down by age and infirmity, that the eye hesitated at first to recognise in her a living creature. The attack of paralysis, which confined her to her arm-chair, had lately reached the head itself, and half arrested her faltering speech.

At the sound I made in approaching her, she turned towards me a mummy-like face, and asked, in a scarcely audible tone,

“Who is there?”

I observed then the glazed and expressionless pupils of her eyes, and found that she was blind.

“Mademoiselle Renaud?” I asked.

“Yes, I am she,” gasped out the paralytic.

I gave my own name; the muscles of her face quivered; it was almost the only part of her body still endowed with motion. She tried to utter a few words, but her voice sounded at intervals only, as if forced out by an internal effort. I managed, however, to understand that her godson was gone out, and that she begged me to await his return; she excused herself

with evident pain at not being able to bring me a chair. I interrupted her expressions of regret by taking myself an arm-chair, which I drew over close to hers.

Mademoiselle Renaud then thanked me for what I had done on behalf of her godson. Impereetibly I grew accustomed to her strange intonation, and understood her with greater ease. I succeeded in separating the effect of her voice from the words she used, and was surprised to find the latter better chosen than I should have expected. Mademoiselle Renaud rounded her phrases with a certain studied elegance; she used each word in its classieal acceptation, and joined to it the appropriate epithet. It was easy, indeed, to perceive as the basis of all she said a combination of grammar with rhetorie. My surprise, however, disappeared when I gathered in the course of eonversation, that she had given French lessons abroad during fifteen years.

She explained, as well as I was able to follow her, that she was born a lady, and had been instructed in polite literature by her father, whose poverty had driven him into the closest retirement; and who, having negleeted his affairs all his life in order to master Marmontel's "Elements" and Dumarsais' figures of speeoh, had died and left her alone, without friends or resourees, at an age when her chances of marriage were already gone. Happily for her, she possessed two treasures superior to all the legacies in

the world:—courage and serenity of mind. She neither thought of despairing nor of complaining; she had no time for that; having, before everything else, to face the world and gain her daily bread.

She accepted, at first, every scholar that was offered to her; then her conscientious devotion to duty brought her into favour, and her lessons were better remunerated; at length, by dint of shere labour, she had succeeded in amassing a little property, when she was attacked by this disease.

In the hope that rest and country air would effect a cure, she had embraced the offer of old Bouvier, and had come to occupy a poor apartment which belonged to him; but far from regaining her strength, she had felt it decline every day, and was now arrived at that state of living death which presented itself before my eyes.

I learned all these facts very gradually, and conveyed in broken sentences, filling up myself the omitted links, and divining what she could not herself express.

Mademoiselle Renaud adapted herself to her immobility as she had obeyed the summons to action: without dismay, and without a murmur.

Courageous through her simplicity, she accommodated herself to the trial, made no claims on others, never anticipated evil, but collected all her powers to support the sufferings of each passing moment.

The only privation which appeared difficult for her

to bear, was that of her favourite books ; she drew my attention to a little glazed bookcase where they were still to be seen on the shelves, though henceforth useless to her.

"Omar has been here," said she, with a kind of gaiety ; "I am now like the human race after the burning of the Alexandrian library ; there remains for me only a confused recollection of what the great authors have handed down to posterity."

"Can no one read them aloud to you?"

"My godson has done so since he came here ; but he is soon about to quit me, and when he is gone silence will return."

"That need not be so, indeed, for if you will allow me," said I, "as it is I who deprive you of your reader, I will myself replace him."

A slight spasm passed over the features of the poor paralysed woman.

"You, sir!" murmured she ; "do you know what you propose to do? To waste your hours in this tomb . . . to have always before your eyes a poor corpse which is unable even properly to thank you. . . . It would be too much to expect from one on whom I have no claim. . . . I cannot accept your kind offer."

"But I insist upon it," I resumed, grasping one of her hands, which had not yet lost all sensation ; "would you then deprive me of one of the rare opportunities granted to me of being serviceable in some

way? I also, mademoiselle, am old and alone, and I often say to myself that I am no longer of use to any person or for anything; prove to me the contrary, and I shall be your debtor indeed."

I felt her hand respond feebly to the pressure of mine; her sightless pupils grew dimmer; it seemed to me that her reddened eyelids swelled with tears, but which froze within those stony eyes, and could not overflow. I heard her murmur only in tones still more subdued:

"May God . . . bless you . . . sir. . . . I accept . . . your generous proposal."

Almost at the same moment her godson returned. I handed him the written agreement, adding some necessary explanations, with my best wishes for his success; and then hastened my departure.

On my next visit to Mademoiselle Renaud, I found that Armand had taken his leave that very morning, and left her to her accustomed solitude. Her only companion being a canary, a present from old Bouvier, that sings in a little cage suspended from the sombre cross-beam. The charwoman who comes to arrange everything for the paralytic, and give her her meals, attends also to the canary, which seems in this sad chamber the sole representative of life; and while singing and flying about his cage, prevents the old lady from entirely forgetting the existence of movement and gaiety.

I have begun the promised readings; Mademoi-

selle Renaud herself selects for me the authors she prefers ; they are for the most part those of the preceding century. The prose writers delight me ; but the poets I can scarcely endure. She bids me take up in succession Crebillion, Lefranc, De Pompignan, Saint-Lambert, Dorat, Lemierre, Destouches, Voltaire. Oh, what strange poetry ! I seem to be treading across parched-up heaths without a flower at my feet, or a ray of sunshine visible in the leaden sky. These lines succeed each other exactly like a winter's rain dropping on our roofs,—without so much even as a breath of wind to interrupt the monotony.

The ennui which flows from them, dims my very sight and deadens my voice. Mademoiselle Renaud, on the contrary, is in perpetual transports. All this rhetoric carries her back to her years of study and of activity ; it is to her like the bows of faded ribbon and the crumpled artificial flowers, which recall the pleasures of the past to the coquette. She quotes to me, in reference to each passage, the criticisms of the Abbé Sabatier, the decisions of La Harpe, or the rules of Lebatteux.

Twenty times I have been on the point of expressing what I thought of this poetry without a spark of inspiration ; but, thank God, I have always restrained myself ; why should I disturb her pleasure, or qualify her admiration ? An Arabian story-teller recounts that a peasant once received a coarse woollen coat from his mother, spun and woven with her own

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hands. The young man grew elated, and fancied himself clothed like a king. A merchant who passed by and witnessed his delight, began to laugh.

"Know," said he to the young man, "that the stuff you wear and admire so much is scarce good enough for a common shepherd."

"Ah! why do you tell me that?" cried the disappointed peasant; "you have robbed me of the pleasure which this garment afforded me, without being in a position to supply me with a better."

I do not wish Mademoiselle Renaud to be able to reproach me in a similar manner. Let her continue to enjoy this stale—ambrosia—that is the word her favourite poets would have used. She shall not perceive either my astonishment or my weariness. Besides, it is not for my own pleasure that I come to read here. Am I not bound to impose silence on my personal tastes, and to consult only hers? Let her ask for, let her order what she will; if it comes to that, I will even read to her the verses of Demoustier.\*

\* A fashionable and affected French poet of the eighteenth century. He wrote several plays, one or two of which had considerable success.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## POVERTY AND OLD AGE.

**Y**ESTERDAY evening, while sitting in my study,  
I heard Roger calling out in the hall :

“ Quick, Mr. Baptiste. Pack up Raymond’s port-manteau : two shirts, two pairs of stockings, six pocket-handkerchiefs : we start to-morrow.”

“ Where are we going ?” I asked, opening the door.

“ You shall hear that by-and-by,” replied he ; “ for the present, it is enough for you to know that we shall be away for a week, so make your arrangements accordingly.”

Seeing that my old domestic did not stir :

“ Well,” cried he, “ did you not hear me ?”

Baptiste bowed.

“ Perfectly well, sir.”

“ Then what are you stopping for there ?”

“ I await the orders I am bound to obey.”

And Baptiste looked towards me, as much as to say

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that it was I alone who had the right to give them. I hastened to repeat the order he had received, and he then retired. Roger shrugged his shoulders.

“Heaven help us! you have got a Chinaman there in your service!” cried he; “a mandarin with a diamond button could never stand more upon ceremony. With such a man life is a legal process: the formal routine must be observed under pain of always recommencing the proceedings.”

“Do you not see that it is his only resource?” interposed I, smiling. “If in the contract between masters and servants everything is not arranged and settled beforehand, domestic service becomes no longer an occupation, but a state of slavery; instead of fulfilling duties, whims have to be obeyed. Rules alone can equitably determine what one side should perform, and what the other side ought to require. They are a security for both; for they equally prevent negligence and caprice. The lessening of self-respect and of the moral sense on the part of servants, arises chiefly from the uncertainty of their duties; in ceasing to belong to themselves, they lose the feeling of responsibility; they are wills in leading-strings, which, from never going alone, possess no longer the power of advancing an inch without stumbling.”

“All very good, no doubt,” responded Roger; “but let us talk now of our journey.”

He had followed me into the room, we sat down, and he then informed me that Mr. de Lavaur, for

whom he acts as agent, had instructed him to purchase a neighbouring farm, in order to complete his estate of La Brandaie. The request was urgent, and it was necessary to start without delay. I promised to be ready at the appointed hour.

*Tuesday morning.*—We arrived yesterday at the mansion of La Brandaie ; the steward had been written to, and had prepared everything for our reception.

Nothing could be more delightful than our journey here ; the air was fresh and bracing ; we saw the earliest swallows of the year darting across the blue sky, and uttering joyous cries on their arrival ; the blossoms hung from the chesnut-trees, and the white hawthorn covered the hedges with perfumed snow. Our vehicle was drawn along by the horses at a steady trot, as if on their return journey, and we were driven by a grey-headed coachman. It was like the symbolic car of old age leisurely crossing the kingdom of Spring.

I recognised all the places we passed through ; all were associated with some circumstance or other of a former period of life, and reawakened memories of the past. Recollections are like shreds of ourselves which we have left on every briar along the routes we have travelled ; they carry us back to the most affecting hours of our lives ; we may say from the sweet feelings they excite, that they are hopes left behind.

Whilst I was endeavouring to rediscover objects I had known in former times, my companion made me especially observe the changes that had been effected

along our route. Here copses cleared away, there marshes transformed into meadows, farther on villages dotted about on the borders of forests, which not long since were in a wild state. What strikes Roger everywhere, is that human tide which advances without cessation, that expanding life whose wave invades every solitude. At each of these victories of man over wild nature he applauds with a loving enthusiasm. How I envy him that noble faculty of looking beyond himself, and of living in humanity ! while my thoughts move only in the narrow circle of my past life, his embrace the history of the world ; he leaves me to pay homage to my patron saint in my chimney-corner, while he himself adores, amidst the crowd, the universal God.

We stopped half way to take breakfast and refresh our horses. As we left the table, I saw near the door an old beggar-woman. She was sitting on the stones breakfasting in her turn on some fragments given her by the landlord. At her feet was a wallet attached to one end of a holly stick. Her coarse garments were neither dirty nor ragged. An artist would have sought here in vain one of those attractive models in rags, immortalised by Murillo. Her face had nothing picturesque in it ; it was common-place, but calm.

On looking up, the old woman saluted us with a certain gaiety of manner.

“ A fine day, gentlemen !” said she, turning her

face towards the bright sun, the rays of which began to play about her wrinkles.

“God grant it may be so for you, good mother!” I replied.

“For me and for all His children,” added she, piously; “but it is already so, for a blessing is on the country. Have you not seen, sir, how healthy the shoots of wheat, how thick the apple-blossom, and how green the fields are?”

“The people hereabouts are contented, then?” asked Roger.

“As contented as those ever are who gather the grapes and the corn,” replied the beggar-woman, smiling; “you know the proverb, sir; he who grows pears has cares! (*Qui a fruits a soucis!*)”

“Upon my word, you do not seem to be one of them, my good woman.”

“You are right, sir; poverty has no business to be disturbed; when we possess nothing Providence is our provider.”

“Hence you are satisfied with your lot?”

“Why should I object, since God has appointed it for me?”

“And notwithstanding that you are old?”

“It is to old age I owe my repose, sir. When young, I was despised for being an outcast, and most people added an insult to the crust of bread they threw me; so I ate cursing; I was jealous of every child I saw who had a mother. After that, when I

grew up, and offered to work for my bread, I was suspected ; people always said : ‘ Where does she come from ? She will be a trouble or a disgrace to the house ! ’ Then, as I was not strong, I was pronounced unwilling. When I said, ‘ I am ill ! ’ they cried, ‘ She is lazy ! ’ ”

“ And now ? ” said I, interested involuntarily.

“ Now old age has come, people expect nothing more of me ; they say, ‘ She is old ! ’ and bestow their alms without insult or reproach.”

I put a small piece of silver into the poor woman’s hand, and we re-entered our carriage. I have thus discovered another advantage of old age.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## A DESCENDANT OF HARPAGON.\*

OUR visit to the proprietor of the farm which Mr. de Lavaur is desirous of purchasing, has been a singularly strange one. He lives in the suburbs of the small town of B——. Roger had warned me that we were about to see a direct descendant of Harpagon ; but the information was unnecessary, the first sight of the place and of the man himself sufficed to reveal the fact.

M. Brissot's house is situated at the bottom of an undrained alley, paved with rough stones, between which the grass grows up luxuriantly ; the flagstone at the entrance is overrun with green moss, and from the gutters along the roof being full of holes, the front walls are covered with long yellow stains. The door has no knocker or bell-handle.

\* The hero of Molière's comedy—“L'Avare.”

Roger was obliged to knock a long while with his stick before we heard the clacking of sabots inside, and then perceived an eye looking through a little hole cut in the shutter. We had to give our names, and explain the object of our visit, after which the door was at length opened. M. Brissot introduced us into a room, which—to judge of it by its contents—combined the purposes of parlour, kitchen, dining-room, and office. The sole ornaments visible were some copper utensils suspended from the wall, and some strings of onions and bunches of thyme or bay-leaf hanging, here and there, from the beams across the ceiling.

M. Brissot had a great deal of trouble to find two chairs enjoying their proper complement of legs, and nothing then remained but a broken stool, on which he balanced himself in the sunshine, which streamed in through the casement unprovided with curtains.

I occupied myself, during the time that Roger explained to him the proposals of Mr. de Lavaur, in examining everything in detail.

Our host is a little man of fox-like aspect, with a narrow forehead surmounted by a tuft of grey hair. A pair of steel spectacles, rusty with time, are pushed now on his nose, and now above his eyebrows, according as he wishes to expose or to conceal his thoughts. An apparent uneasiness keeps him in perpetual motion, and he accompanies your remarks by a low continuous hum, which you are at liberty to interpret equally as a timid protest or a confused assent.

His costume consists of an old pair of trousers of yellowish cloth, a waistcoat of the same material, and a rusty black silk cap, the whole so threadbare, so shabby, and so worn to the body, that it was impossible to imagine one separate from the other. The garments of M. Brissot had come to form a part of his being. Seated lower than we were, fidgeting about, and folded as it were upon himself, he gave the impression of a reptile waiting for its prey.

Roger made his offer at first with caution. The price he submitted was so much below the pretensions of the old miser, that it was difficult to imagine the possibility of an agreement; but neither of them long delayed in advancing his figures respectively, like two armies marching to each other's encounter. At each evolution, M. Brissot groaned aloud as if after a defeat; at length there remained between them only a difference of a few thousand francs; but, arrived at this point, they stopped without appearing disposed to move a single step; it was their Rubicon. Roger seemed to renounce any further concession, and stood up; the owner did the same, writhing like a man in convulsions. Both were evidently indisposed to break off the negotiation altogether, and yet embarrassed how to renew the contest.

A knock at the door came happily to create a diversion; M. Brissot ran to his small hole in the shutter.

“The postman?” cried he, alarmed; “what is it now? what do you want?”

“A letter,” was the reply from without.

“Give it me, then,” said the miser, half opening the door and extending his hand.

But the postman contented himself with showing the letter. “Eighty centimes (8d.),” said he.

The miser drew back his hand as if he had touched a viper.

“Eighty argues!” cried he, like his predecessor. “I take in none but prepaid letters.”

“I know that,” retorted the postman, in an ironical tone; “but this one comes from England.”

“Well, what of that?”

“It is the country of milords, you know, and I thought, perhaps, there was some money in it for you.”

“Ah!” cried the old man, with glistening eyes, and extending his hand again; “you tell me there is some money?”

“Very likely,” replied the postman, laughing; “it is easy to find out, you know, for . . . eighty centimes.”

M. Brissot made a fresh movement.

“No, no!” cried he, pushing the door to, as if he feared he might yield to temptation; “it is too much; I do not know any one in England. . . . Take it away! take it away!”

The postman shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please!" said he, with an air of indifference; "but perhaps, after all, you are acting like fat Peter—you know fat Peter, who, from having refused a packet costing two francs, lost a legacy of ten thousand pistoles; but, as the proverb says, 'A coal-heaver is master in his own house.' Good day."

"Wait a moment!" interposed the miser, a prey to the most cruel doubts. . . . "If I could only be certain. Just hand me the letter for a moment to see. . . ."

He examined it some time, weighed it in his hand, and read half aloud the motto on all the seals; at length the postman lost all patience.

"Come! come! that is quite enough," said he, sharply; "I have no time to lose; as you will not take the letter, give it me back."

But it was now in the old miser's hands, and to abandon what he once held appeared to him too hard. After repeated hesitations, fresh questions, and plaintive exclamations, he paid the eighty centimes sou by sou, closed the door, came near the window, and began to turn the letter over without unsealing it. One would have declared he could not venture upon the precious contents he had just now so dearly paid for. At last he broke the seals with a sigh; a second letter fell out of the envelope; I picked it up.

"For my niece!" exclaimed the old man, after having cast his eye on the address; and evidently

surprised, he hurriedly turned to the end of the letter he held open, in order to see the signature of the writer. Scarcely had he read it, before he uttered a cry :

“ Ah ! From the fellow again ! I have been basely cheated ! ”

He ran to the door :

“ Postman ! postman ! give me back my money ; I will not have this letter ! ”

But the postman had gone out of sight for some time, and Roger remarked to him that the postman could not take it back open.

“ Right ! ” cried M. Brissot, striking his forehead. “ Fool that I was not to have divined the truth ! . . . But I did not know that the worthless fellow was in England . . . and . . . his other missives were all paid for. . . . Ah ! gentlemen, it is an abuse, a frightful abuse ! The post-office ought not to transmit letters unless they are prepaid.”

He turned to the commencement of the letter again, and scanned the first few lines.

“ Ay, that’s it,” murmured he, “ that’s it. . . . He supposes his former letters have not arrived, as he has received no replies. . . . He does not prepay this one in the hope that it will reach its destination with greater certainty. . . . Yes, yes, be quite sure of that . . . and . . . wait till you get my answer ! ”

Then turning at length towards us :

“ Pardon me, gentlemen,” continued he, refolding

the letter, from a habit of carefulness in the minutest particulars ; “ pardon me, this has interrupted us. . . . But, you understand, when a man is not rich . . . these little expenses . . . you see how it is poor people are ruined !”

“ You are quite right,” replied Roger, sarcastically, who had been wonderfully diverted by the scene ; “ believe me, sir, we have not remained indifferent to what has just happened to you ; and in proof of what I say, and to make up to you a little for the loss of your eighty centimes, I will add a thousand francs to my offer.”

M. Brissot’s face grew bright.

“ Excuse me, sir,” said he, smiling, “ but we differed by a thousand crowns. No doubt you meant to say a thousand crowns ?”

“ A thousand francs,” repeated Roger ; “ we no longer reckon in crowns.”

“ Just so, just so,” said the miser, insinuatingly ; “ but you know, sir, a thousand crowns make three thousand francs.”

“ And I offer you the third,” replied my friend ; “ my instructions do not go beyond this.”

M. Brissot surveyed Roger from above his spectacles, and seeing his resolute air, appeared for a moment undecided ; then he shrugged his shoulders.

“ Come,” said he, in honeyed tones, “ we cannot, after all, separate thus ; it will not do for you,

gentlemen, to have made a journey in vain. I will take the sum offered."

"Then the bargain is concluded," said Roger; "forty-three thousand francs, ready money."

"Yes . . . except a few little perquisites, which you cannot refuse."

"What perquisites do you mean, sir?"

"The farm has supplied me with a little wood. . . . I reckoned on that; you would not, sir, expose a man of my age to the cold this winter?"

"We are just about to enter upon summer," observed Roger; "but let it be so; you shall have your usual supply."

"Then there is, besides, the trifles of rent due in spring. . . . I have counted on that, too."

"You shall have it. Is that all, sir?"

"Very nearly . . . that is, excepting some statute labour due from the tenant."

"And on which you have equally counted?" interrupted my companion; "he shall render it, sir. But here we must stop, if you please; no more perquisites, as you call them, or we should become too exacting. Please give me some writing materials, and we will sign a mutual undertaking, from which the lawyer may draw up the deeds in due form."

M. Brissot crossed over to a cupboard, from which he slowly took down a quire of coarse paper and some quill pens worn down to the stump. There was

no ink to be found, so he called his niece to fetch an inkstand.

A young woman of about two-and-twenty entered the room, poorly clad, but whose features struck us.

She was not beautiful, yet a certain grace pervaded her whole being. Her timidity appeared extreme, though it was evident, from her furtive glances and the emotion which revealed itself, as it were, through her embarrassment, that she possessed a soul of great sensibility. She blushed on first seeing us, but afterwards our manner appeared to reassure her. She placed the inkstand on the table, drew a chair forwards, and was about to retire, when her uncle made her an impatient sign to remain.

Roger had taken a seat, and tried all the pens, one after the other, without finding any he could write with. M. Brissot asked his niece if she had not got a newer one. The young woman went out, and shortly returned with a penholder, rather elegantly made, and furnished with a real "Perry" Roger uttered an exclamation of delight; the goose-quill shocked him; it was, in his eyes, a symbol of routine and bigotry; whilst the steel pen was an evidence of modern progress, understood and accepted. He expressed his acknowledgments to the young girl. M. Brissot profited by the event.

"Well! well! you will give the child some little proof of your gratitude," said he, with his forced smile. "I ought not to have forgotten. . . . Ah,

ah, ah! When there are women in the house, we cannot do without pins ; a bargain is never concluded without thinking of that."

The young girl moved uneasily, as if she were about to protest ; but a look from the old man imposed silence on her.

"She is a poor orphan," added he, approaching Roger ; "her mother left her to my care, sir. . . . Another gross injustice, you see. . . . When people do not marry, but save the expense of a wife, they ought at least to be secure from having the burden of children ; but the world imposes on us the children of others by saying, 'Oh, they are your relations !' Now, I ask you, what sort of relatives are those who leave you nothing? Eh? Eh? Eh? But, as for that, sir, you can fix yourself the amount of the pin-money ; I do not wish to limit your generosity!"

Whilst her uncle was speaking thus, his niece was evidently suffering acutely ; her eyes at last filled with tears, and she turned aside to conceal them. Roger saw this as well as myself.

"Very good!" said he, anticipating any fresh solicitations on the part of M. Brissot ; "I will conform to the custom ; but it is a matter for arrangement between the young lady and myself; you need not trouble yourself about it."

The miser opened his eyes.

"I beg pardon," exclaimed he, with a disappointed air, "but the poor child does not concern herself with

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money matters. It is I who take care of everything."

"And that is just the very reason why I wish for your niece to have something for herself," interposed my friend, in a decided tone . . . "but we will talk of that hereafter. See if I have written out my proposals correctly."

He had risen and tendered the paper to M. Brissot, who then commenced reading it slowly to himself with his usual slight hum. At last he persuaded himself to sign the agreement, and we took leave.

On reaching La Brandaie, we communicated to each other our impressions from this visit. What a life does this miserable being lead, whom the world calls rich, but who deprives himself of the most legitimate enjoyments! God, in his goodness, has sent him an adopted daughter, and he regards the precious gift as a burden! Madman, for whom there remains only the light of the setting sun for his enjoyment, and who exhausts himself in gleaning the last ears of a harvest that is destined for others!

This is the only occasion on which I have encountered a veritable miser, equally eager to acquire and preserve, indifferent to everything but wealth, and living to gratify but one instinct. This species of monomania seems no longer suitable to our age. The facilities of intercommunication that now exist, and the rapid changes of fortune, have done away with the isolation which induced the amassing of

treasures. The multiplicity of the means of enjoyment has promoted the diffusion of taste. The man who might have been a miser in former generations has become eager of success in this. We no longer covet millions for the purpose of burying them in the earth, but to create for ourselves new sources of pleasure or higher enjoyment. Does it not follow from this that man, both in his vices and his virtues, travels more out of himself than formerly? He is more mixed up in the vast movements of society. He takes a more decided part in the general affairs of life. Formerly the world kept its riches and its soul hidden away, apart, by burying the one in the convent, the other in the earth; at the present day we sow them both broadcast, without, alas! always knowing where the seed will fall, and what the harvest will bring forth.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## THE ASYLUM FOR OLD MEN.

WE called once more on M. Brissot, and saw his niece again. Our second impression was not less favourable than the first. I succeeded in making her talk, and was charmed with the sweetness of her voice, and her touching simplicity of manner. But what sorrow there appeared beneath it all! One felt sure that it was caused by some deep wound of the heart.

I sought information about her from the steward of La Brandaie. He had heard some rumour of a disappointment in love; of a marriage to which the uncle wishes his niece to consent, in order to get rid of her. But he was unable to give me any particulars. How sorry I was we were to leave so soon, for I would gladly have improved my acquaintance with this

poor deserted one, and, if possible, have been of some assistance to her. . . .

We had been informed of a hospital for aged men in the neighbourhood, founded by the generosity of a rich proprietor. Roger and I expressed a wish to visit it, the pensioners in this asylum being doubly related to us—brothers through Adam, brothers through age.

I hoped to find there, comfort and peace of mind; my disappointment was very great. We saw large court-yards, along which the infirm dragged themselves with difficulty, oppressed still more by ennui than by bodily suffering; refectories, where the weighed-out dinners imposed on all an equality of hunger; public sleeping-rooms, which associated the sleepy and the wakeful, and where the same bell rang out for all—"Rise!"—indispensable regulations, I was told, and I assented, but it gave to the whole an indescribable aspect of gloom and harshness. All traces of family-life are here lost; everything is carried out according to rule, without the intervention of good taste or of tenderness. Men are administered like affairs; they cease to be anything more than groups of figures in two columns, life occupying the *debtor*, death the *creditor* side. Alas! will there always be thus a necessity to crowd together the miseries of old age, and to make those miseries the only spectacle for its victims? Will there never exist a society sufficiently enriched by labour, and

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sufficiently devoted to duty, that will retain the old man in the very place God has ordained for him—I mean there, between the vigorous man, the woman, and the child? Those white hairs would look well mingling with the golden curls ; that weakness would please me when found leaning on the strong ; those infirmities would touch me surrounded by the tender cares of blooming health ; but here I feel myself revolted, humiliated. What means this vestibule of the cemetery, where the world crowds together all these candidates of death, already pale, stricken, and paralysed ? Blessed be he who has opened an asylum for them, but a thousand times more blessed be the age when such an institution will cease to be a necessity, and when love will banish the sadness of this affecting parody of family life !

We conversed with the director of the hospital. He complains especially of his inability to conquer the pensioners' habits. At the age they have all reached, the bent is fixed, the moral spring grown rusty ; the soul remains helplessly in bondage. The repetition of an action which pleases us seems, at first, only self-indulgence ; but it soon becomes a tyranny ; it is no longer the habit which belongs to us, but it is we who belong to the habit. It leads us in a leash, it pricks us on, it condemns us to a torture at once odious and longed for ; the effort even to escape from it brings us back. It is always the story over again of the soldier, whose repeated drunkenness disgraced his

uniform. His captain called him up, praising his courage, his obedience, his honesty. Why should a single vice shut him out from the road to promotion and reward? The soldier, moved, retires with a firm resolution to overcome his fault. He arrives at the door of the tavern which he was in the habit of entering; his resolution is staunch; he passes on; then, rejoicing at his courage:

"Come," says he, addressing himself, "I am satisfied with thee. Come, as a reward, thou shalt have a glass!"

Many of the old men in the asylum encourage themselves, no doubt, in the same manner, for we met several returning with haggard eyes and unsteady steps. Strange taste which creates in us the craving to escape for a time from the consciousness of our individuality, and conducts us towards death, through stages of voluntary delirium! How true it is that to suffer a vice to grow upon us is to raise up an executioner in our own bosoms; that all the foolish sacrifices made in youth of vital power, moderation, and health, are paid for a hundred-fold in our declining years!

While regarding these unhappy beings with their faces inflamed, their trembling hands, and their wasted forms, I thought of that vision (of gin) drawn by some caricaturist's pencil.\* The perfidious tempter appears at first under the form of a smiling genius

\* Cruikshank.

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with a flaming crown. His hands filled with seductive rewards : fairy palaces, coffers overflowing with gold, dances of Peris, thrones and triumphal cars ! The young and ignorant crowd rush forward to forget reality amid these dreams ; they drink of the deceitful cup. But thirst increases ever more, and now the genius is transformed ; his manner becomes imperious ; in proportion as his adorers prostrate themselves and grow weaker, he expands and appears more terrible. At length behold him master ; he has drawn that gasping crowd within his circle of liquid and intoxicating fire ; the false mask which disguised him vanishes, the gracious genius discovers himself in his reality :—he is Death with his eyes of darkness and his sardonic smile ! Death ! that hurries along his frenzied slaves towards the abyss wherein he successively hurls them, and where their convulsed forms are seen struggling in the midst of monsters and flames of fire.

## CHAPTER XXV.

*ILLNESS OF MR. BAPTISTE.*

IT is now some days since we returned from La Brandaie, and I have fallen again into my regular course of life. Yesterday, however, I waited in vain for Mr. Baptiste ; he did not come down from his room till late in the day, and presented himself with a very dejected countenance ; I anxiously asked him what was the matter.

“ I do not know, sir,” replied he, with an effort ; “ but yesterday evening I did not feel at all well, and to-day I am quite knocked up.”

“ You must nurse yourself and see a doctor.”

“ I intend to do so. But as you cannot be left alone, sir, I have arranged with some one else to take my duties.”

“ Do not trouble yourself about that.”

“ Pardon me, sir, but I do not wish my illness to

cause you any inconvenience. Madame Rénié, whom I have communicated with, has promised me that she will find some one to replace her behind the counter, and will come here herself."

"Yes, yes, that is all very well; but first let us think about your illness."

"I do, sir, and have come to take leave of you."

"Why, what do you mean! where are you going?"

"To the hospital, sir."

I started up almost with a bound.

"To the hospital!" I repeated; "and you imagined I would suffer you to go there?"

"It cannot be helped, sir," replied he, calmly; "I have neither relatives nor home here."

"And pray what is this house where you are now?"

"It is . . . your home, sir."

"It is ours," cried I; "you have your place here, and you shall keep it. Never have the domestics who could be nursed under this roof, gone to the hospital to usurp the bed of the poor."

Mr. Baptiste bowed.

"You are very good, sir," began he, "but . . . I cannot accept your offer."

"But why?" I demanded, with surprise."

He appeared embarrassed.

"I hope you will pardon me, sir," he replied, after a moment's hesitation; "it is a fancy of mine. I prefer the hospital."

"Would you have no confidence in my surgeon?"

"Quite the contrary, sir."

"Are you afraid of not being properly nursed here?"

"It is not that."

"Then explain yourself, I beg," cried I, with some impatience. "I must know the reason of your preference."

He looked at me and coloured up.

"Gracious Heavens . . . I am afraid . . . of displeasing you, sir!"

"No, speak out."

"Well, then, as you bid me, sir . . . I do not know you well enough to accept this kindness."

"I do not understand you."

"I mean that, if you were to nurse me, you would have a claim on my gratitude."

"Which you are anxious to avoid?"

"It is not that, sir; but the Count, my late master, was in the habit of saying that gratitude is a debt, the amount of which is left in blank, so that the debtor and the creditor very rarely agree as to the sum due."

"Then you mean to say, that you are afraid I should become exacting?"

"I am afraid, sir, of appearing ungrateful in your eyes. When you have done more for me, you will naturally expect more devoted service in return; that which satisfied you under ordinary circumstances

will, perhaps, no longer satisfy you on the part of a servant under obligations."

"I now see your motive," I interrupted him, a little piqued; "Mr. Baptiste has not sufficient confidence in me to allow me to do him a service."

"That is it, sir," replied he, naïvely. "The Count de Farel often said that, before accepting a benefit, we must be sure of our power of repaying it in gratitude."

"Very good," replied I, seriously; "but did he not also tell you, Mr. Baptiste, that we must allow every one to fulfil his duties in this life?"

"Undoubtedly, sir."

"Well, then, one of mine is to retain in my house, when sick, the servant whom I have engaged in good health; I have profited by his strength, I must submit to the inconvenience of his infirmities. This is not generosity, it is justice, and you have not the right to prevent me from being just."

"That is true, sir," replied he, bowing.

"Allow me also to tell you," I continued, with a dash of irony, "that you are too prompt to suspect me capable of playing the usurer in respect of benevolence; and as you have not yet had time to become acquainted with my character, give me credit, I pray you, for some little humanity and disinterestedness."

Mr. Baptiste began to make excuses, but I interrupted him.

"Enough of this," cried I, in a cordial tone; "we

will resume the subject at some other time; for the present, the only thing to be done is for you to get up-stairs and go to bed."

He seemed indeed quite confused; his eyes were dim, and his teeth chattered. I took him by the arm and led him up to his room.

Félicité, who just then arrived, went for the doctor. The latter has not been able to detect any special symptoms of disease; he has, however, recommended rest and some simple medicines. I have seen personally to the execution of his orders, and have established myself in the sick man's chamber.

It is long since I was there, and now I have had an opportunity of discovering all its deficiencies. The chimney smokes, the window-sashes do not close tightly; the floor, composed of tiles, is without any matting or carpet; the sun shines in upon the bed, which is unprovided with curtains. I reproach myself for this neglect. Whilst each day we add to our own comfort, our domestics remain exposed to a thousand inconveniences. We lodge them under the roof, we supply them with worn-out furniture, we do not trouble ourselves about their constitutions or their tastes. For millions of labourers, life is, no doubt, still more harsh; but the former have always under their eyes the self-indulgence of their master, his precautions, his pleasures. Every object reminds them of their condition of aliens. But even if their state of dependence were assured to them, it would be some-

thing ; if they had not hanging over their heads every day the threat of dismissal ; if they did not live eternally as at an inn, only serving instead of being served !

Yet we complain at finding them indifferent to the interests of a household which is not their own ; and often hostile to the prosperity, which increases the distance between themselves and their masters ! We should rather feel surprised at their zeal. The greater number of their vices spring from their position ; all their virtues are their own.

I made these reflections while trying to remedy the principal defects in the garret occupied by the invalid. An old carpet has been brought up, some curtains stretched across the window, and a stove fixed in the chimney. Mr. Baptiste thanks me at each little addition to his comforts. But there is never any complaint on his part, or sign of impatience ; every direction of the physician is scrupulously adhered to ; he seems to treat his malady as he does all the world, with a ceremonious politeness, and to be willing to dismiss it only according to the proper formalities.

*15th March.*—No change as yet in Baptiste's state : the disease hangs about him without taking any precise character. Roger has been to see us, and sought to give his advice. During the last few weeks he has been dreaming of nothing but homœopathy, and has tried to make a convert of Mr. Baptiste. At first he brought forward arguments, then a hundred cases of

sufferers given over and abandoned by the doctors, who were restored to health by means of the globules. But Mr. Baptiste proves invulnerable. He has confided himself to the doctor ; between them there is a compact—the one is bound to follow all the orders given, the other to effect a cure ; it is, in the eyes of my old servant, a question of honesty.

In vain does Roger object that allopathy can do him no good, that for the last eight days it has left him in the same state ; while he, Roger, will undertake to set him on his legs again before the end of the week. Mr. Baptiste thanks him, raising his hand at the same time to his nightcap, but persists in his resolution. Roger at length starts up, rapping his stick against the floor :

“ Well, then ; go to the devil with you !” cried he ; “ you will end in having a long illness !”

“ The good gentleman who attends me will prescribe for it,” replied Baptiste, unmoved.

“ But what if he has mistaken your case ?”

“ That is his affair, sir.”

“ And suppose you die in consequence ?”

“ The doctor, sir, must bear the responsibility.”

Roger looks towards me, seizes his hat, and rushes out in a rage.

“ Heaven forgive me ! that old fool assists at his malady as a chamberlain assists at court receptions,” said he to me on the staircase ; “ he contents himself with announcing the symptoms and the remedies,

without interesting himself further in the matter ; one would suppose the ball was not given at his expense. After all, let him manage his own affairs ; one cannot force people to be well, you know."

Nevertheless, Roger does not cease to present himself with new arguments and additional examples. Mr. Baptiste listens to all, and replies with the same expressions of thankfulness and the same touching of his nightcap ; but of late I begin to perceive these visits distress him. The familiar vivacity of Roger shocks his formal nature ; my old friend sometimes calls him Baptiste, quite short, shows him that he thinks he is an obstinate fellow, and declares that if he were in his service he would homœopathise him in spite of his opposition. I have several times requested Roger to be more circumspect ; but he cannot control his natural impulsiveness ; he insists upon it that Mr. Baptiste is an old fool, and that he prefers even his dolt of a Réné to him.

Notwithstanding these outbursts, however, he returns daily to inquire after the sufferer's health, and brings him every little delicacy allowed by the physician ; still there is a bluntness in his manner to which Baptiste cannot grow accustomed. The part of the benevolent but austere father does not please us except on the stage ; in actual life we do not like roses which have a thorn under every leaf.

*25th March.*—Our sick man has at last left his bedroom ; a little thin, a little pale, but cured.

This morning, when I went up to his garret, I found him dressed and ready to come down-stairs. I allowed him to have his own way, but placed him under the care of Félicité, who solemnly promised that at the first attempt on his part to go beyond his strength, she will send him back to his bedroom.

I have installed him in my study, which is enlivened by the sun, and where he can see the passers-by. I have also placed some books at his disposal, and my bird-organ for him to give a singing-lesson to the canary. At each new arrangement for his comfort he thanked me with an expression of deep feeling. I at length asked Mr. Baptiste if there was anything else he wished for.

"Nothing, nothing," replied he, "only to beg you, sir, henceforward, to call me simply—Baptiste."

"Why so?"

"Because, sir, I shall always feel that from this day forth, my relations with you have become changed."

I was touched at this proof of his gratitude, and gave my hand to my old servant, adding a few sympathetic words.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## SPARROWS AND SWALLOWS.

WHEN frost or rain has prevented my walking into the country, and the tardy sunshine at length permits me to leave the house, I step down to the prettily laid-out green which is situated at the end of our quarter of the town, where Roger seldom fails to join me. This is the usual rendezvous of the children and old people of the neighbourhood ; the two extreme links of the human chain seem to approach each other here. On one side of us there is childish laughter, romping play, curls scattered over rosy cheeks ; on the other, bald heads, tottering steps, and long intervals of silence.

I love to see this medley : when brought thus together, childhood appears more grave, old age less sad ; one is the complement of the other. We learn to comprehend life better when observing the point of

arrival and the point of departure at one and the same moment.

Why do we not multiply the opportunities for these wholesome gatherings? The ancients were most careful not to lose sight of them. It was part of their policy to select men who had already lived long in the world, to be the instructors of those who had to learn the art of living. The former communicated their experience; the latter learned respect. Youth was taught then, as Aristophanes has it in his comedy of "The Clouds," "to hate discord, to blush at discreditable actions, to resent insults to its modesty, and to rise in the presence of old age." I do not, of course, advocate a return to the system of education pursued at Athens; every age has its own requirements, every form of society its peculiar methods; but I do wish that, amidst so many palaces built for kings, for the arts, and for manufactures; a few spots, well shaded with trees and abounding in flowers, should be set apart for infancy and old age. I do long to discern, amidst the prevailing solicitude for what is no longer of use, or for what has not yet been utilised, some proof that society is not only a queen, but a mother; that it loves those whom it governs, and does not wish to substitute the beehive for the family. I do especially desire that, by bringing into close proximity the generation just born and the generation whose work is done, great public benefits in education might be secured; that

the child might learn, in venerating age, gratitude for past service, active sympathy for weakness, compassion for infirmities.

But how shall we persuade people to dwell on such ideas in our modern world, where everything resembles an encampment, and institutions are like tents beneath which men's ideas bivouac for a night, to commence marching anew with the dawn? For a century past, what moral harvest has had time for ripening? what day has had its morrow? At each halting-place a chorus of voices vainly cries to the human race, "Let us stop here; this is the promised land!" But the multitude extinguishes its camp-fires, and starts tumultuously on its journey, returning twenty times to the same spot only soon to press forward afresh—ceaseless wanderings of Adam's posterity, which, ever weary and ever on the march, seems condemned to lose itself in dreams pursued during eternity!

I made these remarks to Roger, this very morning, as we were walking together under the trees, in our little park at the outskirts of the town. He was indignant at my doubts and my complaints.

"Good Heavens! do you imagine, then, that God has created the human race to stagnate?" cried he. "Do you not perceive that the whole universe is in motion; that this, in fact, is the great law of the Creator? If man could realise his hopes, he would be man no longer; for the complete correspondence of reality with his ideal would turn him into a god."

The primary condition of his life from moment to moment is aspiration, and he who aspires progresses. But as man's light is imperfect, his progress is uncertain; humanity often revolves upon itself, and returns to the same starting-point, but always better informed, and the discovery of error is a step towards truth. If men listened to the voices of those, who would persuade them to confine themselves to one fixed idea and to one method, the entire world would pass into the state of ancient Egypt under its theocratic government, which was simply a vast social petrification, wherein everything was arrested at the point at which tradition had once established it. The human race would, like her, be induced to take for its emblems divinities seated with immovable arms, and crowned with vultures having their wings symbolically folded. But what would be the use of knowing even that the wings were there, without sufficient breathing-room in which to expand them?"

"So that," I interposed, "you regard man in his social state as a sort of Wandering Jew, condemned to go onwards until the consummation of all things, without compass and without object?"

"No, not without compass; for in the study of the eternal laws he has a perpetual manifestation of the Supreme will," replied Roger, warmly. "He is not without an object, if he walks where God directs him. Do not compare man to the Wandering Jew, but rather to the Hebrews marching through the

desert, and sending before them all their hopes, on eagle's wing, towards the promised land—that land which we shall only reach after running into numerous dangers, and worshipping many a golden calf. What we require is to have our faith strengthened, our souls purified by temptations, the vices of Egypt forgotten, and the corpse of slavery left behind, as with God's people of old, in the sands of the desert. Then only will the trumpets of Jericho resound. But the land of Canaan itself will not be the haven; the contest must continue to the end of time, because these efforts are the very law of our progress towards perfection. Do not ever talk, then, dear friend, of absolute settlement and of repose: repose means the termination of life, and the absolute does not belong to this world."

. . . While conversing thus, we reached a bank, and seated ourselves under the shade of some lilac-trees. The buds were beginning to redden at the extremities of the branches—“*ver rubescens*” (blushing spring), as Virgil says. The boughs of the trees and the leafless bushes cast their shadows on the gravel, and gave rise to a thousand fanciful designs. One might have regarded it as an immense net spread out upon the flood of light around to hold it captive. Between the meshes there hopped about a number of familiar sparrows, who came almost close up to our feet, looking at us with their heads on one side and an air of pert curiosity; and then chirping amongst

themselves with mocking tones, as if they understood that we were talking about philosophy.

I confessed to Roger that I have always had a liking for the sparrow; he is the only bird who inhabits the town at all seasons of the year, and refreshes us with some notes of nature's music. Our chimney-pots are his forests, our slates his grass-plats. He awakens every morning the little servant-girl by chirping on the wallflower which ornaments her window-sill; he amuses with his twittering the poor labourer's child confined to its garret; he is, in short, the nightingale of our roofs.

"Say, rather, our street musician," replied Roger; "for he lives, like those vagabond minstrels, only on alms or by rapine. To listen to you, the sparrow is a sort of messenger from the fields, occupied in encouraging amongst us diligence and good humour; but I, who know him well, assure you that he is nothing better than one of those upstarts who, by dint of impudence, make us smile at their vices. An idler, a glutton, and a thief, the sparrow is the chief vagabond of the air. Do you happen to know, for instance, his conduct towards the swallow?"

I confessed, with a smile, my ignorance.

"Well, then," resumed Roger, with as much animation as if he were about to mention some outrageous case from the police reports, "I will explain the facts to you just as they occur; and I am not going

to repeat what others have told me, but what I have seen with my own eyes, '*and that is seeing indeed*,' as Molière's Orgon says. You are aware that one of my study windows overlooks a large court-yard surrounded by domestic offices. There I have established my observatory. At our age, you know, we have time to observe; the world's absorbing interests have sufficiently lost their power, to allow us to look clearly into every subject, and experience has taught us to despise nothing; so I spend an hour almost daily in studying my winged neighbours, and I recommend the same pursuit to you, Raymond; it is peaceful, instructive, and free from danger, which cannot be said of many other occupations."

I nodded assent, and promised to profit by his advice.

" You must know, then," resumed Roger, " that the court-yard where I pursue my observations attracts a crowd of sparrows; for parasites are never wanting where there is a free table. I see them every day picking up crumbs under the very nose of the persons in charge of the house, and twittering with rage when the latter happen to interfere with their proceedings. Well, let that pass, I abstain from condemnation. Racine has said of the birds that, God is their provider :

To the fledglings He gives their daily food.

The sparrows, at all events, have taken the poet at

his word, and have become communists ; but it is at this point that the wrong commences. Every spring the swallows reappear on the buildings surrounding our yard, and select some suitable spot in which to build their nests. You know with what care these admirable workmen construct the homes destined for their future families ? Solid mortar outside, a bed of down within ; the father and mother strive to outdo each other with their joyous notes of encouragement. The sparrows, who have equally entered upon married life, ought to imitate them ; but no, they watch the swallows at work, chattering all the time ; they prolong their nuptial fêtes, they fly about, they quarrel, until their neighbours have completed everything. Then taking advantage of the absence of the proprietors, they enter the new habitation and examine it ; if they find it to their taste, they fetch up a piece of straw as evidence of taking possession, crying out like Tartuffe, '*This house is mine !*' and when the swallows reappear at the entrance, they are received with sharp beaks."

I felt compelled to blame the sparrows, who so criminally justified the line of Virgil : " *Sic vos non vobis nidificatis aves.*" \*

I only ventured to add that the crime of these winged marauders was not without example amongst men.

" And that is just what renders it the more ex-

\* So, you, O birds, build not your nests for yourselves.

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crable in my eyes," replied Roger, with good-humoured indignation; "they convey a perverse lesson which is quoted as an authority; they have the appearance of saying to mankind: 'Creation is established after this manner: pleasure for some, labour for others; let the swallows build nests for the sparrows.' How many nests are similarly usurped in the world! How many people there are who, to obtain possession of an edifice built by others, have only thus to bring to it a straw! This man, his name; that, his credit; yonder woman, her fortune or her beauty! Always straw-motes which have cost them nothing!"

"Capital," I exclaimed, laughing; "but what compels us to imitate the winged usurper of our house-tops? Nature's lesson has no more value than that of the schoolboy: he can always choose from among his examples. The sight of evil corrupts only the man who loves it; it repels those who love goodness. Man makes his own destiny, and it depends upon his choice whether he is the sparrow or the swallow."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. DUTILLEUL AND HIS DEFINITION OF AN IDEA  
—LETTER OF IMAUM ALI-TADE — WHAT PUR-  
POSE IS SERVED BY THE INACTIVITY OF THE  
AGED.

**F**ELICITE'S little business prospers ; she is thinking even of extending it, but has not sufficient capital ; she came to see me this morning, and explained her difficulty. One plan only occurs to her of overcoming it, viz. to obtain on credit a few thousand francs - worth of goods from M. Dutilleul, our wealthiest merchant here. But how can she venture even to ask him, she, poor woman, who is scarcely able to complete a single sentence if you look her full in the face ?

Her first thought, she told me, was to get Réné to write a letter in her name ; for Réné has a talent for composition, as I must already know, from having

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seen his written offer of marriage ; but both have decided that a request on my part would be much more favourably received. I will yield to their wishes, though with small hopes of success.

M. Dutilleul is my senior by some years, and he is said to be worth five or six million francs (200,000*l.* to 240,000*l.*) ; but neither age nor wealth has inspired him with a taste for repose. He rises before the sun, and works with his clerks far into the night. He conducts everything according to his own plans. His voice and his eye are everywhere—that “eye of the master” which, according to the old fable, suffices to fatten his cattle. M. Dutilleul’s cattle are crown-pieces, and Heaven only knows how well he can make them multiply.

I was obliged to follow him from warehouse to warehouse. He had always quitted the last one just as I reached it ; at length I found him superintending the landing of some colonial produce. He was checking the number of bales, rejecting those which had sustained any damage from the voyage, and chaffering about the duties to be charged. Ten persons were engaged in executing his orders, and ten others in receiving his instructions. It was impossible for me to interrupt him ; at length, after all had been arranged, he started off for another quay where a ship was loading ; we were able to converse on the road.

On learning the nature of my request, he took a note of it, and said that he would make inquiries,

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promising me an answer after having done so. I apologised for having disturbed him, in the midst of his occupations, on a matter of such trifling importance.

“Everything is important in business, my dear professor,” replied he, with his powerful voice, ending with a loud laugh: “we, poor merchants, despise nothing. It is by means of the pennies that we make our crown-pieces—ha! ha! ha! I am a regular Yankee, for everything suits me that yields quick profits. I am none of your dandified merchants, who, as soon as they have made a few hundred thousand francs, resign their counting-houses to others, and retire into the country to read books and grow pinks —ha! ha! ha! At seventy-three I am still the most active of them all, and old Death will find me with my nose over my big ledger, or with rule in hand amongst my stores.”

“So that you do not feel the need of a few hours’ reflection towards the close of life?”

“I! why should I?”

“Well, for self-examination and serious thoughts concerning the future. When coachmen reach a dark and unknown road, they proceed at a walking pace only.”

“Time lost! time lost! Man is placed here below to fulfil his calling, and to make money. I have adopted, for my part, the device of the Englishman, who, they say, was a great poet—‘Forwards!’ but for-

wards in a corn-field—ha, ha, ha,—as long as we are on our legs let us be gathering in the harvest.”

“ Yes, that is what Carlyle calls *the gospel of labour*; with him, to act is to accomplish the law of God. But one of his countrymen, Mr. Mill, on the other hand, praises *the gospel of leisure*.”

“ Oh, some idle fellow, no doubt?”

“ No, indeed, he is a political economist.” .

“ Well, it is the same thing in other words.”

“ Mr. Mill gives, nevertheless, some reasons which appear to me not without force. According to his view, the employment of human energy without intermission, striving against others in the race after wealth, bears a singular resemblance to the conduct of our forefathers, in devoting their lives to the conquest of foreign lands with the sword; it is an exercise of the will—a sort of progress, no doubt, but still an exaggerated employment of certain faculties only. He does not believe that the beau-ideal of social life is to be found in that ever-increasing strife of the multitude, who, in order to surpass each other, struggle with, trample down, and crush those around them; and succeed, at length, in procuring a superabundance, which they cannot enjoy themselves, and to secure which they impoverish so many others. He is but indifferently captivated with that American state of society, where the entire life of one sex is occupied in hunting after dollars, and the entire life of the other sex in bringing up little hunters after dollars. He pre-

fers that feverish activity to the apathy of some decaying nations, no doubt ; he recognises in it one of the inevitable, but melancholy phases, of the progress of humanity ; but he longs for the day when every man, after having given to society the flower of his intelligence, of his vigour, and of his life, will enter upon a beneficent repose, and leave the field clear for younger labourers.”

“Capital ! capital ! I understand it all. Mr. Mill has got a crotchet !” cried my companion, with his coarse laugh. “Well, I must tell you my coachman taught me the other day what a crotchet is. I wished him to take one road, he wished to take another ; and as I maintained that mine was the shorter, he shrugged his shoulders, saying : ‘Ah ! that is a crotchet of yours, sir,’ . . . as if he meant to say, ‘It is an absurdity—ha, ha, ha !’ ”

Upon this, M. Dutilleul took leave of me ; we had reached the ship, the loading of which he had come to superintend. I left him surrounded on all sides by packages, casks, and bales of cotton, and returned slowly, reflecting on what had passed.

Is it, then, really so, that the theory of the English economist is one of those crotchets comprised in the answer of the coachman ? What ! so many gifts bestowed by God on his creatures—so many efforts of the intellect, so much courage, so much bloodshed, so many acts of sublime devotion, and all this solely to augment the wealth of the human race ? Are we,

then, sent here only to acquire riches which we are never to enjoy, for the purpose of transmitting them to our descendants, who will increase them still further without any greater enjoyment on their part? All those tastes which find gratification only through leisure: the arts, science, the contemplation of nature and of man, the elevation of the soul to God, are all these only so many *crotchets*, as M. Dutilleul derisively calls them? Or is it not he rather who gives the lie to his nature of man, by sacrificing every natural aspiration to one single instinct? What better than a savage is this furious worker, who reduces life to the transformation or to the exchange of matter, and ignores the most refined instincts of the soul? The activity, the patience, the courage which the red Indian displays in trapping the beaver and scalping his enemies, M. Dutilleul devotes to scalping his rivals, and trapping his five-franc pieces! It is a difference of race only, but, at bottom, the exercise of the same instincts. What he carries out is but war in disguise; preferable to that of the red Indian no doubt, but which can never be the definite object of man's existence on the earth.

It is under the influence of this Anglo-Saxon fever, that passive natures become inspired with an intenser love for things as they are; in beholding so many futile movements, such people are more than ever determined to remain quiescent. I met not long ago, in the appendix to Layard's "Ninevah," with an elo-

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quent testimony to this effect of our turbulent agitation. It is the reply of a Mahomedan Cadi to a letter, in which the English traveller requests him for statistics of the population, commerce, and progress of the town, where he exercised his magisterial office. I insert here the answer for my own satisfaction :

“ My illustrious friend, O joy of mortals ! what thou askest of me is both useless and hurtful.

“ Although I have passed all my days in this district, I have never thought of counting the houses, or of ascertaining the number of the inhabitants; and as to what goods this man or that may load his mules with, or pile up in the hold of his ship, verily it is a matter which does not at all concern me. As to the former history of the city; God alone knows it, and He alone can tell the multitude of errors in which its inhabitants swallowed before its conquest by Mahomet ; it would be dangerous for us to seek to know them.

“ O my friend ! O my lamb ! do not seek to learn what does not concern thee. Thou hast come amongst us, and we have given thee the kiss of welcome ; depart in peace !

“ Verily all the words thou hast said unto me have done no harm ; for he who speaks is one, and he who listens is another. After the custom of the men of thy nation, thou hast wandered through many countries, and yet thou hast not found happiness anywhere ; we (praise be to God !) were born in this spot, and do not desire to leave it.

"Listen, O my son, there is no wisdom equal to that of believing in God. He has created the world; ought we to try to equal Him, by seeking to penetrate the mysteries of His creation? Ought we to say: Behold that star which revolves around that other star; behold the star yonder which draws a tail after it, and takes so many years to come and so many to depart! Leave it, my son; He, whose hands formed these things, will know full well how to guide and direct them.

"But thou wilt say to me, perhaps: 'O man! give place, for I am more learned than thou art, and have seen things thou art ignorant of.' If thou thinkest that these things have made thee better than I am, be twice welcome; as for me, I bless God that I do not search after what I have no need of. Thou art instructed in matters which do not interest me, and what thou hast seen I despise. Will all thy knowledge create thee a second stomach; and thine eyes that go ferreting everywhere, will they cause thee to find Paradise?

"O my friend! if thou desirest to be happy, cry: 'There is no God but God!' Do no evil, and then thou wilt fear neither men nor death, for surely thine hour will come.—Imaum ALI-TADE."

Here is another savage, one who waits upon his pillar for the birds of the air to come and supply him with food. Duty and truth lie between the Turk and M. Dutilleul, that is to say, between the im-

mobility of the fatalist and the activity without re-pose of the utilitarian. Solomon has said, "There is a time to stand up, and a time to sit down." Man is neither a plant destined to grow from a root without locomotion, nor a blind horse harnessed till death to the mill, which grinds the corn for our supply of daily bread. He is bound to think also of bread for the soul; to take time to enrich his heart, and to open the eyes of his understanding.

Old age ought especially to serve for this purpose. After having completed its day's labour, the evening should be employed in intellectual enjoyment and the intercourse of affection; and in that study of the Impalpable and the Invisible, which is a part of the heritage of Adam as surely as the earth and the ocean.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE OLD DUELLIST.

THE spring continues wet; long walks are impracticable, and Roger and I are obliged to content ourselves with the avenue, where we arrange to meet each other from day to day.

This afternoon some old men, our contemporaries, were scattered about there, as usual. Friendly couples were pacing up and down the gravel walks with measured step; others talked in groups, occupying the open seats. Roger drew my attention to each face in succession, where time had left such different traces of his course.

"We all resemble," said he to me, laughing, "those old Egyptian monuments, which bear on their exterior the history of a dynasty. The grand thing required is to know how to decipher the inscriptions. The wrinkles that furrow our cheeks, our lustreless eyes, our wagging heads, our bald pates, are so many

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hieroglyphics, which recount the history of our lives. We have heard a great deal of the peace of mind of certain criminals, and the prosperity of well-known rogues; but look them in the face, when old age has engraved on their foreheads the secret of their souls: you will find the expression of a Louis XI., of a Philip II., of a Catherine de Medicis, or a Tiberius. After all, no house can have been occupied by a bad tenant for sixty years without retaining some record of the fact. The brow which has long concealed odious thoughts is like a dungeon where great criminals have long been immured; after a careful scrutiny, you will surely find the walls polluted by blasphemous inscriptions."

"Possibly," I replied; "but how many men are there who have nothing to inscribe! Great criminals are, like great saints, the rare exceptions; the vast majority oscillate between good and evil almost without preference, raised higher, or depressed lower, according to the breeze that passes, and, like the kite the schoolboy flies, always between the brook and the clouds. That you should be able to read the face of a Tiberius I can understand, but what will you decipher from that of Punch?"

"His vices," replied Roger. "Do you imagine, then, that such inscriptions must have the importance of an epic poem in order to be deciphered? Do you forget that some kitchen bill or other has been found inscribed on the Pyramids? Punch, say you; but has

he not ill-treated his wife, beaten the policeman, provoked the devil; or, in other words, failed in his duties towards his family, society, and God? And who, indeed, can pronounce himself, in these respects, altogether guiltless? Punch, dear friend, is—I, you, everybody; and, although vulgar, his history is not the less real or the less striking. Study well these faces that are around us: there are here, I presume, neither famous criminals nor men of extraordinary virtues or of marvellous genius. What you see is only the small change of humanity; but, like coins of silver or of gold, every piece has its image and superscription, the details of which show the effects of the wear and tear of time."

Then, in order to prove his statement, Roger began to comment on each aged face as it passed before our eyes, and to give me the history of its possessor. One might have taken them for a series of living "illustrations" without titles, of which he had to give the history.

For some time I derived pleasure from this amusement, into which my companion threw all his accustomed sprightliness and inexhaustible fancy; but my attention was at length attracted by a solitary figure, which had until now escaped Roger's remarks.

His appearance indicated one of those premature victims of a decrepitude, which is the result less of the number than of the employment of one's years. Leaning on a crutch, he slowly dragged his swollen feet

after him, his head shaking as if hung upon a wire ; when he looked up with an effort, he cast his haggard eyes about, the sinister expression of which seemed to convey a menace. No companion cheered his footsteps ; no greeting was given him as he passed ; he stood alone in the closely planted avenue which he had selected for his walk ; every one appeared anxious to leave him to occupy his own quarter, and to breathe his own atmosphere.

I only made these observations by degrees, and did not even know if I had not assumed a great deal at random, when I perceived the solitary promenader advance towards a bench to sit down. On seeing him, two old men who were there rose up quickly, and moved away without speaking. The infirm object followed them with an angry look, murmuring a few words which ended in a ghastly smile.

Surprised, I pointed him out to Roger.

“ Do you know who that man is ? ” I asked.

He turned towards the bench to which my eyes directed him, and started.

“ That man,” repeated he, moving away in the opposite direction ; “ do you not recognise him ? ”

“ I think I have seen him before, but I do not know his name.”

“ It is Simon Chamard.”

“ What, the duellist ? ”

“ Yes ; he lived for many years in a neighbouring village ; the necessity of putting himself under medi-

cal treatment has no doubt brought him into the town."

I remarked that the miserable creature could scarcely support himself on his feet.

"Would to God he had been always so," replied Roger; "or rather we may ask why such a person was ever born . . . unless, indeed, as a scourge for our follies. . . . Yes, I will believe that these wretches even, who enjoy the privilege of assassination in the presence of witnesses, are not altogether useless; that they open the eyes of society to the barbarity of its prejudices, and in carrying those prejudices to excess, with all their attendant horrors, prepare the way for future reforms."

"Oh, may their advent be hastened!" cried I, "and the world at length cease to justify an insult by striking the man who has received it."

"Wherefore have banished from our courts of law *the judgment of God* of the middle ages, when it has been perpetuated in our manners? Are those nations indeed civilised by Christianity, where skill and audacity can put morality and reason to flight?—where, to be respected, it is not sufficient to be respectable, but to inspire fear?—where honour results from an argument, that consists not in having right on one's side, but in killing or being killed?"

"Patience," exclaimed Roger; "light will penetrate the conscience of society; it begins to do so already. That man is a proof of what I say, for he

expiates at this moment the murder of Captain Ribert."

I looked at Roger with a view to learn more.

"Probably you do not know the mournful story," continued he; "you were then on your tour in Germany; but all our contemporaries could give you the particulars; for who did not know Captain Ribert? Every one loved him for the sweetness of his manner in doing a kind action, as well as for his excellent disposition. Wherever he appeared all was gaiety. As he walked in the Mall, having his wife on his arm, and holding the hand of his little boy, every one turned to bless the happy trio. He seemed thoroughly to deserve his happiness. One man only appeared offended at it, and that was Simon Chamard. He hated the captain, but no one could tell why. They had never exchanged one word. Ribert scarcely knew of Simon's existence; but that ignorance even was a species of challenge in the eyes of the duellist. He was surprised, doubtless, that any one should have the presumption to live without acknowledging his superiority. A happiness to which he caused no alarm seemed to him an insult. In addition to this, the general respect which was paid to the captain offended his vanity. Every temple of Ephesus must needs have its Erostratus; so he determined at length on silencing the chorus of praise which wearied him. But a pretext must be found. The captain did not visit any of the places frequented by Simon Cha-

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mard, hence the opportunity of meeting with him might not occur for a long time. Simon had not the patience to wait for it. One day, as the captain crossed this very promenade, he went straight up to him, with his hat on his head and a cigar in his mouth, and rudely demanded why the captain stared at him. Ribert, taken by surprise, began to protest; but it was the old story of the wolf and the lamb. Chamard pretended, also, that his adversary had "spoken ill of him the year before," and must be called to account for it. The rest is easily imagined. The captain's uniform made him the slave of that barbarous custom, which puts the life of an honest man at the mercy of the first ruffian who passes by. The duel took place, and was fatal to Ribert. He was brought home in a dying state to his wife, who could hardly be made to realise so terrible a misfortune. He had still strength enough left to pronounce her name, and to kiss his son, and then he expired."

"And his murderer remained unpunished!" cried I.

"No," resumed Roger; "this time public opinion asserted itself. The indignation was so great that it dispelled fear; contempt was shown on all sides, and the provocations of Simon Chamard were no longer taken the least notice of. After having struggled for some time against public aversion, he was forced to quit the town; and since then he has not abandoned his solitude. But you see his absence has not made the

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past forgotten ; an infamous notoriety remains attached to his name ; every one here knows him ; he is avoided, pointed at with the finger, and insulted without being able to defend himself, or to punish those who annoy him. . . . But stay—is not that he whom they are shouting at yonder?"

Roger directed my eyes towards the entrance-gate of the public walk, where, in fact, I saw the old duellist at a stand-still. He had just made an effort to descend the flight of steps by supporting himself, in evident pain, against the stone balustrade ; whilst a troop of schoolboys, urging each other on in the open space in front, made fun of his difficulties, and laughed at and mocked him.

"There goes Simon the assassin !" they all cried out. . . . "Ah ! ah ! just see how he creeps along."

"Come ; will you have a duel with us, Simon ?"

"We defy you, every one of us !"

"Oh, the coward ! he refuses."

"Look at him ! he is afraid."

And the shouts became louder and louder.

He who was the object of all this noise tried at first to descend, threatening his crowd of tormentors with the stick that supported him ; but, overcome with agony, he was compelled to desist, and, leaning against the wall, with his lips trembling and his hands clenched, he expressed in so striking a manner the incarnation of impotent rage, that I felt a mingled pang of horror and of pity.

"What a retribution!" I exclaimed, greatly moved.

"It is indeed, but a just one," replied Roger, with severity. "This man has outraged justice, and justice no longer acknowledges him; he has shown himself to be without pity, the world has now no mercy on him. He has abused boldness, power, and skill, and now behold them turned against himself. Ah! I wish that all those who take pleasure in the excitement of a duel as in a successful hunt—that all those who thirst after human blood and dispose of a man's life between two meals, could have such an example before them. In the humiliating shouts of those boys, I seem to hear the voices of all the orphans made by that man; their chorus of maledictions swells forth, now that he cannot escape from it; utter weakness revenges the weak, and the implacable man is punished by the implacability of children. In his case, as with all of us, the periods of youth and manhood have laid the foundation for that of old age; for the character of this last is simply a result which we make for ourselves. A great orator (Lacordaire) has said that the human soul undergoes upon this earth a series of metempsychoses, which spring one out of the other; carried forward through the ignorance of childhood to the passions of youth, it there becomes poisoned or purified; then the grave duties of maturity follow, from which it emerges, laden with experience, to enter upon old age, where it finds at last a port—or suffers shipwreck."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

ROGER'S OPINION OF THE MISSION OF OLD AGE—  
FATHER BENEDICTION; HIS HISTORY—BIG JAMES  
—THE SHEPHERD'S CROOK—FATHER BENEDICTION'S HOPES.

THIS morning I found Roger engaged in carrying out some improvements in his menagerie. He is now devoting himself to the domestication of several new species of animals, destined probably to add to the pleasures or the resources of our descendants.

“Up to the present time,” said he to me, while attending carefully to the wants of a pair of llamas, the breed of which he hopes to naturalise in France—“up to the present time, society, only half developed, has not troubled itself to introduce order into its proceedings; it has always been in motion, wandering for wandering's sake, buying or selling in that

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wretched market called war, and far more solicitous to acquire, than to turn what it has acquired to good account. But the period of maturity has, at length, arrived ; each nation must now turn its attention to internal development, cultivate its fields better, and improve its herds. The peoples have evidently got beyond the period of adolescence—when hunting, trifling, and quarrelling, were their chief occupations—to that of ripe age, when men think how they shall turn themselves and their neighbours to the best account. It is essential that the balance of wealth should everywhere be established by exchange, that each nation should contribute of its abundance, and receive what it requires in return. In every country, the banquet of the human race is but imperfectly supplied, all that can be made to perfect it must be added from elsewhere. Every new plant discovered, every animal converted into an auxiliary of man, is a fulfilment of the law, which has given him ‘the earth for an heritage.’ To us, who have the leisure of old age, this mission especially belongs ; the temperate blood circulating in our veins gives us patience ; and the hours that remain to us are, as it were, a largess of Providence which we can liberally bestow upon the human race. So that henceforth my sole ambition will be, to leave to my native land some such peaceful conquest ; that I may wake up in the valley of Jehoshaphat, like Parmentier, bearing in one hand a small flower as a symbol (understood formerly)

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to my brethren, that I have closed one of the doors of famine. Every night I dream of this and fancy I have succeeded. . . .”

“ And that is the reward of your elevated desires,” I interposed ; “ our waking thoughts become the spectres of our sleep ; friendly or terrible, according to our deserts.”

“ Well, my dear Raymond, you are repeating now what I was saying to myself only this morning ; and here comes the very person who led me to make the reflection.”

He pointed to a man soberly dressed, standing beside a little dog-cart, which had just stopped outside the court-yard. I fancied I recognised in him an old Englishman who goes about our streets, collecting at every door household fragments, broken glass, bones, and rags.

“ Is it not the Huguenot ?” I inquired.

“ Many call him so,” replied Roger, “ but a frequent exclamation of his has led us, at our house, to give him the name of ‘ *Father Benediction*. ’ This morning the noise of his waggonette and his street-cry made me start out of one of my favourite day-dreams, and I thought then of the numbers he must every day bring back as suddenly to their world of realities ! How many kings are there not dethroned by this humble passer-by ! how many lovers separated, great poets again sent back to obscurity, illustrious orators reduced to silence, and victors made

to descend from their triumphal cars ; but then, again, how many victims in the midst of imaginary perils are as suddenly reassured by him ! how many supposed crimes or causes of mourning happily dissipated ! This old man who every day destroys so many illusions, how well does he represent that other sleepless wanderer who passes every dawn beneath some window, where his summons rudely interrupts the dream of life, awakens the sleeper, and restores him to eternal realities.”

“ Capital !” I exclaimed with a smile ; “ but the good man has probably very little idea of enacting so poetical and imposing a character ?”

“ I am not so sure of that ! I am not so sure of that !” repeated Roger ; “ do you happen to know Father Benediction ?”

“ By sight only.”

“ I must introduce him to you, then ; he is not, I assure you, the kind of man his occupation and his dress bespeak him. Come, I should like you to hear him talk a little and relate his history to you.”

We accordingly approached the old Huguenot, whom I had never seen quite close to me before. He has a Socratic cast of countenance which is displeasing at first, but if you take the pains to observe him more attentively, the unusual development of his forehead gives him an expression of dreamy ideality. His eyes are good, and his mouth is indicative of singular benevolence.

On seeing us approach, he came a few steps towards us and bowed to Roger, who mentioned my name. Father Benediction, it appears, knows more of me than I had supposed. He has for several years past been a client of my humble establishment. Félicité used to save for him everything that could add to his store, and Mr. Baptiste continues the same custom, so that our conversation commenced without any restraint.

I was struck with this Huguenot rag-gatherer's language. Notwithstanding certain faults of accent and gender which betray the foreigner, it is easy to detect in it proofs of a literary culture not altogether without pretension. Father Benediction evidently enjoys witnessing the surprise of his listeners. He likes to quote, and he speaks slowly, with a slight degree of emphasis, not without its charm.

In all he says there is a certain spirit of refined stoicism. His history, which Roger drew out of him by degrees, made everything clear to me.

Father Benediction, it appears, is the son of a poor Welsh clergyman, who had educated him to become his successor. The straitened circumstances of his family, and also, if I understood him aright, disinclination on his part, led him to turn sailor; when, being taken prisoner, he arrived in a dying condition in France, where he would have perished through illness and want, but for the sympathising aid of a woman whose interest was excited by his desolate condition.

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She was a small shopkeeper, left a widow many years previously, and after having nursed him like a sister she took him into her service. When the hour of deliverance arrived, the prisoner had become necessary to his benefactress, whose accounts he had kept entirely, and whose business he superintended. She had also insensibly grown accustomed to his presence ; pity had given place to a tenderer sentiment ; she let him see this, and the man whose life she had saved, did not hesitate to devote it to her.

Their union was a long and happy one, and at her death the wife of the former prisoner left him all she possessed ; he now thought only of selling off his stock in trade, and returning to his family to relieve their poverty with the means at his disposal. The property was realised, and the very day of departure fixed on ; he went forth to take leave of his brother-in-law, with whom he had never been on good terms, but whom he was loth to quit without trying to affect a reconciliation.

This brother-in-law was a clever and ambitious man. Some fortunate speculations had enriched him ; he desired to become a millionaire, and risked more largely, when fortune turned against him. The very day before, his ruin was complete ! When our heir, who was ignorant of everything, arrived, he found the house full of bailiffs, and the master fled. Bankruptcy and a criminal prosecution were even spoken of! . . .

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Here the old man stopped, as if the recital had reawakened emotions of the past. Roger put his hand on the narrator's shoulder, and looking towards me, said :

" Go on, good father, go on ! tell us that, to spare your wife's brother such a disgrace, you sacrificed freely all that belonged to you."

The old Huguenot uttered his favourite exclamation to which he owes his surname.

" Benediction ! do not imagine that I did so at once, or without difficulty," he replied ; " no, no, the carnal man at first revolted within me. I had said to myself, like the Jews of old in their exile, that I was on the point at length of seeing my Jordan once more. We poor Welsh people, you see, love our scanty heaths. Would you believe it, sir, that to this very day a single whiff of turf smoke stirs my old heart, like a recollection of childhood ! No, no, I did not give up, at the first summons, the gold that would have taken me back to my home amidst the holly-bushes."

" And yet you did decide on doing so ?" I observed.  
He raised his hand with a kind of solemnity :

" When the devil had said all he had to say, God spoke," replied he, gravely. " The former reminded me of those who were far away on the borders of the British Channel, and showed me the pretty garden at the parsonage and the gate painted red, where I had kissed my little sisters for the last time. But God, on

the other hand, recalled my thoughts to the departed one, who had given me all I possessed, and asked me what she would have done, had the honour and life of her brother been at stake? I remained during several hours without replying, gentlemen; but the voice of God replied for me. It whispered that she would have given all to him who had the greatest need of it; and my conscience said, Amen!"

" So that you were able to pay the creditors?"

" In part only, but the crowns of silver were accepted as if they had been crowns of gold; and when all had been given up, they excused the rest."

" And so you were able to save the bankrupt?"

He shook his head :

" It is God alone that saves, sir; he whom I sought to benefit had forgotten Him; and having no longer any hope in life, he had, as the Scripture says, 'espoused the sepulchre.' "

" And what did you do then, yourself?"

" Why, I followed the example of the labourer in the parable, I offered my services at the tenth hour; unhappily the vineyard was full. To give me work some older servant must have been dismissed, or I must have been taken out of charity; many people offered to do so, but I declined, and said to myself, 'Look below all the rest, and thou wilt find some post vacant.' It is in this manner that I have become what you see me."

" So that," cried I, with a shade of bitterness, " we

behold in you to what self-sacrifice brings a man in this world,—to misery and abandonment.”

“ Benediction ! who says that ?” exclaimed the old man, quickly ; “ do not suppose that I am in want of anything, sir ; I am richer than you imagine. You must not judge the tree by the bark. I could, if I desired it, allow myself greater indulgence ; but the Bible says that life is an encampment, why then adorn it with silken curtains when the traveller with the sharp sword may pass at any moment, cut the cords, seize the tent, and use it as a winding-sheet for us ?”

“ Very good,” I replied ; “ but so long as we remain in this world, each of us owes to society all the powers and intelligence he possesses ; why should we make ourselves appear of less importance than nature intended ? Seeing what God has made you, good father, could you not take a higher position, and be more useful to society ?”

“ I cannot tell that, sir,” said he, smiling ; “ perhaps it is well to teach others that it is possible to stoop low without falling. There would be no harm done, in my opinion, if some of those who might keep themselves in the middle class were to descend to the lower ranks ; they would attract towards them the most degraded, inasmuch as shoulders that touch always try to reach the same level ; it is a law of human nature. But to speak truly, I did not devote much thought to the matter when choosing my present occupation ; what decided me was, its easy execu-

tion, and at the same time its humble nature. There is great comfort in thus placing ourselves lower than all the beams, against which the forehead of our pride might strike itself; to walk freely without having to stoop one's head, like the little children. Humility is the best protection against humiliation, besides which, it is really the most suitable state of mind for man, and especially an old man. What are the mightiest in God's hand? And we old men of all others, what are we under the weight of our years? Do not whole generations of men resemble those clouds of dust driven about by the wind yonder in the corner of the yard?"

"You do not complain, then, either of your lot or of mankind, Father Benediction?" observed Roger, gently.

"I have no right to do so, sir," replied he, "for ever since my birth, I have always met with consolation and assistance on my journey. We are only dissatisfied with others when we esteem ourselves too highly; and would have the human race solely occupied with our welfare, as with that of a priceless treasure. The first condition necessary to avoid complaining of mankind is not to over-value ourselves; and to believe that where we are expecting to find the genius of a statesman, a magistrate, or a general, there are very often only the elements of a rag-gatherer."

After speaking thus, the old Huguenot smiled, and, turning towards Réné, who had brought him a basketful of fragments, he distributed them in the several

compartments of his cart, addressing, at the same time, some kind words to his great dog in harness.

The latter had lain down at his ease, with his two powerful paws stretched out in front of him like a lion, and his eyes half closed. He seemed to be dozing as he basked in the sun's bright rays. At the voice of Father Benediction the dog raised his head, and a regular conversation took place between the old man and his companion. At each word of encouragement, or at each question, the dog replied by a peculiar bark, a movement of his ears or tail, well understood by his master, who continued immediately, as if he had caught the meaning of the reply.

I remarked to Roger this singular comprehension. The old Huguenot shook his head.

“Yes,” said he, “animals understand the human voice as we indeed understand music. It does not convey ideas to them, but the expression of feelings that delight or sadden, irritate or soothe, encourage or alarm them. A man must have arrived at our time of life, gentlemen, to observe all this. So long as we are young, in default of friends, we have, at any rate, acquaintances; but later in life the ranks grow thin, and at last deserted, and then our eyes are attracted towards these poor dumb creatures who live at our feet, and we try to understand them. At twenty, a dog is only a servant or a plaything; at sixty, he is a resource against solitude.”

While speaking thus, Father Benediction finished emptying one of the baskets Réné had brought out,

and was going to take the other, when an angry exclamation, followed by curses, made us all turn round.

Near the entrance-gate there stood a man in rags, with a basket slung across his shoulders. His grizzled beard half concealed a face pitted with small-pox, and flushed at the moment from drink. He was crumpling with one hand his torn cap, through the rents of which his coarse hair appeared in short tufts, whilst with the other hand he violently shook his rag-gatherer's hook.

"There he is again, stealing the poor man's bread!" cried he; "that beggar who grows fat on what belongs to us—that enemy of God! Down with the Englishman! down with the Huguenot! down with people who give to him rather than to Christians dying of hunger!"

"At any rate they are not dying of thirst," I added, looking at Roger. "But who is this wretched man?"

"Who am I?" cried he, without leaving our host time to interpose. "Here are some of your great men indeed, despisers of the poor! Who am I? Ask that of your thief of a rag-gatherer there, who fills his cart at our expense, he knows me well enough!"

"Benediction! that is true," exclaimed the old man, tranquilly; "he is called Big James."

"Surnamed The Quart-pot!" added Roger.

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"That's it!" continued the drunkard; "and surnamed Prison, surnamed Hospital, surnamed Famine—as many names as he owes to his mother, Dame Poverty! Ha! ha! ha! We know well enough what we are called, we poor devils who have not been christened fund-holders on coming into the world! We are enemies—mad dogs—whom it were best to see trodden down and thrown into the ditch! That's true, isn't it, my worthy gentlemen? And to bring this about, you keep all your scraps for a rascal of a foreigner, whilst the native rag-gatherers may go fish in the gutter! And that is what such as you call equality, I suppose?"

"That is what we call justice," replied Roger, angrily. "What have you ever done to deserve the sympathy of respectable people? Are you known for anything else but your drunkenness and insolence? Have you, in the whole course of your life, like this man whom you insult, done anything to serve as an example for better things? What is there connected with you to call forth the interest of others? Come, mention a single praiseworthy action of yours—a single good intention, even. Come, speak; we are ready to hear you."

Roger uttered these words in a tone of marked severity, at the same time approaching the gateway, just opposite the rag-gatherer, from whom he was only separated by the grating. Master Quart-pot, somewhat disconcerted, stammered out a few words;

all his copious vocabulary had disappeared ; and, on our friend opening the gateway, he retreated, muttering that he did not mean any affront.

But Father Benediction, without saying a word, had stepped forward in the meanwhile, and emptied into his receptacle the contents of the second basket. The drunkard stared at him with a puzzled look, appeared to hesitate for a moment what to do, then rudely turned his back on us, and went off singing.

Roger shrugged his shoulders.

“Wasted alms!” murmured he, in a low tone. “That man disgusts me ; he dishonours old age ! He knows it himself, too. Did you not see, when I demanded of him what claims he had on our interest, he was at a loss for a reply?”

“Because he had given one previously,” exclaimed Father Benediction.

“How do you mean?”

“When he told you the name of his mother—Poverty. Ah, sir ! people do not sufficiently know what that word implies. It is Pandora’s box ; every ill proceeds from it ; and the one hope that remains at the bottom is death ! I never meet Big James without a pang at my heart. Poor fellow ! he knows of nothing beyond this world’s enjoyments, and these are all denied him ! and oh ! to think that such is the miserable lot of so many thousands of our fellow-

creatures ! Of all the pleasures of this world one only is left to them—brandy !”

“ But, at any rate, Father Benediction, you are also poor.”

He raised his bald capacious forehead towards us.

“ Do not think that,” replied he, emphatically. “ James spoke truly just now ; I am rich, gentlemen ; I have the means of purchasing a finer estate, than any of those you are acquainted with in these parts.”

We looked at each other in surprise, and I involuntarily recalled some vague reports I had heard of the old Huguenot’s mind being slightly affected. He doubtless saw my suspicion, for he smiled, and laying one hand on Roger’s arm and the other on mine, he continued, in that solemn measured tone which he occasionally assumes :

“ This astonishes you, does it not ? But listen to an allegory which my father often related to me during my childhood. According to the ancient historians of Persia, there was a river in that country formerly, which spread abundance on every side. Where it flowed the grass grew as high as wheat, and the wheat as high as young trees ; so that the inhabitants paid the same respect to it as to a god.

“ Now, it happened that on a sudden the stream diminished, and at length dried up ; so that the fields became parched, and a great famine arose in the land. The King of Persia knew not how to discover the

cause of this sudden calamity, and he engaged to bestow the finest province of his kingdom on the man who could explain it.

“ In the meanwhile, however, a shepherd’s staff; which had floated down on the diminishing stream, had been brought to the king, and on it the name of its owner was engraved. One of the king’s courtiers begged this staff of him, saying that he hoped by its means to accomplish the desired object ; and he accordingly set out, ascending the dry bed of the river. Everywhere on his route he exhibited the staff, offering, at the same time, a large reward to whomsoever would find the shepherd who was its original owner. He arrived in this manner at Damascus, where he still showed his staff, always repeating the same offer. A shepherd from the mountains approached, and cried out that the staff was his, pointing out the marks which he had engraved on it himself.

“ Upon this, the courtier took him aside and inquired how it was that he happened to lose it in the river.

“ ‘ I tend my flocks on a lofty mountain,’ replied the shepherd, ‘ close to a large lake, where I water them night and morning. But the surface of the lake used to be lower than the banks, which inconvenienced the sheep very much. I perceived at length, one day, that the water escaped by a subterranean canal ; and in order to raise it to a higher level I piled up stones at

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the mouth of the canal, until it was closed, so that the lake rose up to the level of its banks ; but in doing this I lost my staff down the fissure, and I am very much surprised that you have found it.'

" 'Rejoice with me,' replied the courtier, 'for we both owe our fortune to this accident.'

" And having accompanied the shepherd to the mountain lake, he removed the stones which closed up the subterranean issue, so that the river reappeared in Persia, and spread fertility there anew, to the great delight of the king, who bestowed on the courtier a recompence double that which he had promised."

The old Huguenot paused here for an instant ; then, looking at us with a grave aspect :

" Know that I am like that courtier," added he ; " I have here the shepherd's staff by means of which is found the source of the river, the messenger of plenty ; and through this I shall obtain an eternal inheritance in the kingdom of my Father."

He had drawn from his bosom a little Bible, which he kissed.

" Here is the cause of my being rich and Big James poor," continued he, softly ; " the river flows for me, whilst for him it has dried up, or rather it never flowed at all. To grow old without perceiving aught beyond this world, is to assist, hour by hour, at our own ruin ; but for him who has laid up his riches elsewhere, to grow old is to draw near the day,

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when all the interest due to us shall be paid a hundred-fold."

Having said this, he bowed to us with quiet gravity; and uttering a low cry of encouragement, his great dog jumped up, and Father Benediction left with his little cart, the rumbling of which gradually faded from our ears as he turned down the cross-streets.

### CHAPTER XXX.

HISTORICAL LESSON DERIVED FROM AN OLD TOWN  
GATE . . . THE SIDE OF PROVIDENCE, AND THE  
SIDE OF MAN'S FREE WILL.

RETURNING yesterday from the house of an aged relative, Roger encountered in the little diligence which travels between various towns in the neighbourhood, our old schoolfellows, the barrister, Heriot, and Lefort, whom he had not seen since our dinner together on St. Nicholas-day. Beaulieu stopped in the middle of one of Barat's songs which he was humming. Lefort greeted him with a line of Horace, and Heriot took three pinches of snuff, one after another, which was equivalent with him to a remark.

There were mutual shakings of hands, inquiries after each other's health, occupations, and pleasures . . . and then they began to talk politics—that inevitable common-place subject, which people start who have nothing to say to each other, and is, in fact, the rain and fine weather question of society.

People ask each other's opinion of public affairs, as they would ask if it were not too hot or too cold. When there is nothing to be said of mutual interest, you must, of course, talk to your companion of the human race in general.

Heriot gave an exclamatory cough in his profound manner upon a dozen passing questions ; it is the usual way in which he expresses his opinions. Lefort proved from several passages of Cicero, and from a maxim of Hesiod, that the last act of the Legislature would be disastrous for the nation, and the barrister sighed for the old Parliaments.

Roger, annoyed at what was said, felt compelled to change the subject ; and looking out of the coach door, grew enthusiastic at the improvements visible on all sides. He invited his companions' attention to the better cultivated fields, the hilly roads recently levelled, the increase in the number of houses. But Beaulieu interrupted him by declaring that the neighbourhood was quite spoiled. He spoke of a morass formerly lying in the route, over which ladies, when taking their country walks, were obliged to be carried ; of crosses erected to commemorate murders at various spots about the fortifications, each of which afforded materials for some ghastly narration ; of the ruggedness of the old road that could only be ascended on foot, and at the top of which was a small tavern, where travellers were served with beer and hot dinners.

“ Happy route ! happy period !” said Heriot, con-

firming each exclamation by a shake of the head, which gave it the profundity of a phrase of Tacitus.

“*Forsan et hæc olim meminisse juvabit!*”\* added Lefort.

“Yes, yes,” cried our friend, “but your hot dishes and beer, gentlemen, wasted an hour; your exciting stories would go but a little way to recompense the victims for the inconvenience of being assassinated; and the countrywomen who did not happen to have gallant cavaliers to assist them across the morass, sank in it up to their knees.”

“Be silent, calumniator of the past,” interrupted the barrister, with a laugh; “how ungrateful of you to ignore your souvenirs, and betray your youth. I, my dear fellow, speak of mine, as in the song,

Charming is my Fanny,  
In her simplicity.

I only console myself for your pretended improvements, by regarding what still remains to us of the past; for instance, this fine archway before us, which is the solitary relic left standing of the old fortifications.”

“And under which the waggons cannot pass without unloading,” observed Roger, parenthetically.

“What a picture of strength! How the enemy must have remain chafing before that low and narrow arch!” exclaimed Beaulieu.

\* And perhaps it will be a pleasure to recollect these things hereafter.—*Virgil.*

"Here is our driver just in the position of the enemy," added my old friend, pointing to the horses brought to a stand-still before the encumbered passage.

"So that Charles the Bold tried in vain to force it," continued the barrister, without paying any attention to Roger, "for the terrible duke encamped here, gentlemen, with his troop of warriors, and the noble gate refused to open for him."

"Thank God!" interrupted Roger, as the diligence passed beneath the vault; "it has, at any rate, discovered that we are not Burgundians."

"On each occasion that I pass through this dark archway," resumed his self-satisfied companion, "I fancy I perceive in it a symbol of the powerful institutions of a period, when everything was built solidly upon an immovable foundation."

"And in which diligences, I hope, were included," exclaimed Roger, who felt the vehicle give a sudden lurch. . . . "Good Heavens! gentlemen, our wheel is grazing the wall . . . we are going over."

A general cry was the response; for the prediction was no sooner uttered than fulfilled.

Some moments of alarm and confusion ensued; for the passengers, forced one against another, and stunned by the shock, had, at first, some difficulty in distinguishing who was who. The small chaise, the presence of which under the narrow arch had caused

the mischief, could neither be made to go backwards nor forwards. And the drivers, instead of assisting, only insulted and threatened each other. At length the coach door was opened ; each passenger got out with a little assistance, and it was found that the injuries were confined to a few bruises only. The barrister alone, whose wig had disappeared in the general confusion, was furious, and threatened the drivers with an action. But both of them declared with oaths that it was the fault of the too narrow passage.

“ What are they saying there ? ” cried Roger, gaily ; “ to dare to complain of a gateway which Charles the Bold laid siege to ! ”

And, addressing the postilion, he added :

“ Do you not know, you rascal, that, thanks to this gateway, our countrymen were enabled in former times to repel their enemies ? ”

“ Pooh ! And is that any reason why, in our time, it should prevent the entrance of friends ? ” demanded the driver, while labouring to disengage his jammed-up wheel.

Roger turned towards his companions :

“ Why, really, there is some truth, you know, in what the fellow says,” began he ; “ it may be that what was suitable at one epoch when the object was to keep people outside, is not quite so suitable when it is for the public interest to get them inside. That which was admirably adapted for your boasted age of

war and distrust, may well be found inappropriate in our day of commerce and of peace."

And as the barrister gave a shrug of impatience :

" After all, I agree with your remark just now," added Roger, with a friendly touch on the arm ; " this gateway is a symbol of the institutions of its own date, admirable for our forefathers, useless for us. What remains of them in our customs and laws, resembles this old fragment of a past organisation, and serves only to cramp the energies of the present. Believe me, dear friends, the rules established by men resemble men themselves. A day comes when, like their ancestors, they must needs give place to a younger generation. Suffer, then, the demolition of gateways which have become too narrow, lest you should be overturned ; and do not go to law with our coachman, for here he comes with your wig."

After this Roger shook hands with his three fellow-passengers and quitted them. This afternoon he gave me a good-humoured account of his adventure ; and while on the subject we talked of the happiness which the old experience, when they have preserved their independence of thought, in following the progress of the human race through successive ages.

History, indeed, is the proper study for us, who belong no more to the past, who scarcely are of the present, and who will never see the future. Placed, so to speak, above Time, we are in a position to observe better ; events do not carry us away in their headlong

course. Removed into the reserved seats as spectators, we can follow the world's drama with the tranquillity of mind, which enables us to comprehend it and estimate its real value: hence it affords Roger and myself a continual subject of conversation. To-day we spent a great deal of time in reviewing our respective theories.

Roger never grew tired of laughing at our old companions, who seemed fixed in the wheel-rut of their recollections, and convinced that there is no road beyond. He grew fervent while narrating to me that romance of our race, which is the astrology of the philosopher. He explained how the great developments of nations are controlled by Providential laws, and I agreed with him; he described society to me as like a field perpetually being cultivated, the harvests of which are more bountiful in proportion to the labour bestowed, and I still agreed with him; he told me that men of genius are like those relays of horses, which instinctively pursue their course whither the world requires to be led, and I am not at all disposed to assert the contrary. But he also wanted to persuade me that wars are the most potent agents of civilisation; he declared that human affairs march on independently of individual efforts, and of the revolts of conscience, and that the victorious are in God's appointed way because of their success. But now I could no longer be silent; for my heart rebelled against that idea of Providential action which, like

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the destiny of the ancients, would deprive man of his liberty, and always regard the victim as an enemy of the gods.

What, then, is success to be the sole arbiter of the justice of actions? Has the human race never erred? Is there nothing to be done but to suffer ourselves to be carried onward by the current of events, sure that it will bear us to the right destination? To watch whence the wind blows and to spread the sails accordingly, is then a fruitless task! the vessel carries within itself the law which will guide it, either with or in spite of our aid! Farewell, then, to every feeling of admiration at fruitless acts of self-sacrifice; to all pity for the vanquished! The decrees of Providence are all in all for us. But what possible value can our actions have, if well- or ill-doing cannot influence human destinies? Wherefore that hatred of the one, that admiration of the other? No, no, man is not a leaf drifting before the breath of the Almighty! The hand which man brings to bear upon his work is injurious or beneficial, according to his enlightenment and his motives. Success no more justifies an action than failure condemns it.

Besides, who can tell how many defeats are necessary to open the way to the boasted victory? And how many obscure men labour without visible results, to secure the triumph of him who seems to accomplish the will of Heaven? When we cry, Glory to Alexander, Conqueror of Persia, do we not cry at the

same time, Glory to all those unknown Greeks, who from the siege of Troy to the battle of Platea taught Europe how to vanquish Asia? When we repeat, Long live the memory of Newton and Descartes, the liberators of the human intellect! do we not include, also, Long live the memory of the obscure thinkers who, during so many ages, have drunk the hemlock, or suffered at the stake, to prepare the way for that liberation? But Roger opposes me in this; the study of German literature has brought him to a kind of Pro-vidential fatalism, which makes him regard history as a great epic, the plot of which has been composed beforehand; so that we can do nothing more than recite the part which has been set down for us.

## CHAPTER XXX.—(CONCLUDED.)

RENE A DISCIPLE OF THE ANCIENT PHILOSOPHERS  
WITHOUT KNOWING IT.

WE were at the height of our argument on the above subject when Réné entered in great trouble, and it was some time before he could make himself understood. He balanced himself first on one leg, then on the other, until Roger grew impatient, and the poor fellow more and more confused. I felt induced, at length, to interfere at the first opportunity. Réné turned towards me as to a new-found protector.

“Yes, sir,” gasped he, in a wild manner, “that is it, just it.”

I gathered from this that he must have been giving an explanation, and endeavoured to find some clue in that chaos of words without beginning or end.

"Exactly, Réné," said I; "so you have just told your master . . ."

"As you were saying, sir," exclaims he, hurriedly.

"And you appear annoyed that . . ."

"Certainly, sir, but it is not at all my fault."

"Then it is the fault of . . ."

"Of nobody, sir."

"So that you came . . ."

"For nothing, sir."

Roger raised his two hands to heaven.

"And this fellow has been baptised as a being endowed with reason!" cried he.

"Been baptised," repeated Réné, offended and surprised; "certainly I have! If you doubt it, sir, I can send for my certificate from the country. Baptised at the parish church; and vaccinated as well. No, indeed, you must not think that I am deficient in anything of that kind; I am not to be called a pagan because an accident has happened to your porcelain, sir."

"My porcelain!" repeated Roger—"what porcelain? What do you mean? Will you explain yourself or not?"

Réné starts back, his eyes more glaring, his mouth wider open than ever. I stop his master with a gesture of the hand. By putting the incoherent words uttered by our scarecrow together, I begin to suspect what the matter is all about; and deciding, like

Vertot, to commence the siege before the arrival of the official documents,\* cry out :

“ I have it ! Are you not in correspondence, Roger, with a German collector who is studying the ceramic productions of various ages ? ”

“ You mean Doctor Lutroff ; of course .”

“ And have you not been expecting some specimens from him ? ”

“ No . . . Oh ! stop ! Yes, I did communicate to him my wish to examine some antique vases from the Canary Islands .”

“ Well ! There is the explanation, my dear fellow ; he has sent them to you by the boat ; is it not so, Réné ? ”

“ No, sir, by the diligence .”

“ And probably the package has miscarried .”

“ That may be, sir ; but it arrived this morning, for they came to tell me about it .”

“ Then, Réné, you have only to go and fetch the package .”

“ Certainly, sir, if you order me ; but I have been to fetch it already .”

“ And they refused to deliver it ? ”

“ Yes, sir . . . because they had sent it by the porter .”

“ So that it is at home now ? ”

\* The Abbé Vertot, a celebrated French historian, who declined to alter his narrative of the Siege of Malta on the arrival of fresh official documents, saying : “ They have come too late ; my siege is finished .”

"There can be no doubt of that, sir, for I have taken care of all the pieces."

"What pieces?" cried Roger. "The case is broken, then? Confess at once, you rascal!"

"Gracious Heavens! what else have I been doing?" cried Réné, angry at length that he had not been better understood. "They were the first words I uttered, sir! You recollect that when I entered I said, 'If you please, sir! it is not my fault; it is all because the carrier took the road which brought him by the 'Golden Sword,' and which drank so much that the carrier could see no longer; so that the package rolled down the staircase, and the nails were not strong enough. . . . I knew you would be vexed, sir, but I assure you I could do nothing. It was intended to happen. That is what I have been explaining to you, sir, and it seems to me to be clear enough."

And the poor fellow, evidently satisfied with himself, gave me a look as much as to say, "I appeal to your justice in the case; you are bound to support me."

I stopped Roger, with a smile, as he was on the point of proving to Réné what an idiot he was.

"Well, one thing is at length evident," I said to him; "your Etruscan vases are reduced to dust, and we must make the best of it."

"Confound it all! that is easy enough for you," exclaimed our exasperated antiquary; "but for me it

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is a serious matter. I have hitherto sought in vain for specimens of this very pottery. The loss is irreparable! And to think that it is all the fault of that drunken porter!"

"Do you think so?" I interposed.

"Why, did you not hear him say that the case arrived uninjured?"

"Doubtless."

"And that the fellow let it fall down-stairs?"

"Quite true."

"And that his awkwardness was the sole cause?"

"Ah! that is where I do not quite agree with you, my dear Roger. If it is certain that everything which happens is the fulfilment of a decree of Providence, why do you quarrel with men for doing what they cannot prevent?"

"I beg pardon, but I must take the liberty . . ."

"It is taken away already, my dear Roger; thanks to your doctrine, there does not remain to us a single atom of it; we are nothing, you know, but instruments in invisible and all-powerful hands."

"Grant me . . ."

"Nothing, nothing! I can grant nothing, for I am master of nothing. Your specimens of pottery have disappeared, like the race which manufactured them, in accordance with the established order of things. You will not allow that the latter perished in consequence of the errors and crimes of the mariners who discovered the Canary Islands? Why should

you assert that what remains of their productions, has disappeared through the bad construction of a crate, or the drunkenness of a porter? Your broken vases are just as much in the wrong, as the nations themselves which are exterminated. Réné quoted for you the final expression of your philosophy of history, when he said just now, ‘It was intended to happen!’” And as Roger, a little disconcerted, grumbled out the famous dictum: “That is quite another affair!” of “the school for old men”—that everlasting reply of those who have none better to give—I took hold of his arm and addressed him gently :

“Come, dear Roger, antiquities are in fashion to-day; an old gateway spoke for you this morning, this evening your antique vases speak for me; but you must not quarrel with me, for all that, but say, with the Mussulman, as he was being impaled, ‘Thus it was written!’”

## CHAPTER XXXI.

MR. BECHEREL, THE COLLECTOR—HOW PET BIRDS  
MAY BECOME A MEANS OF INTRODUCTION BE-  
TWEEN NEIGHBOURS—A NEW HOUSEHOLD—MY  
SUPPOSITIONS.

FOR the last fortnight I have had some new neighbours. I never could comprehend the habit of large cities, where each man lives on, indifferent to the beings who dwell beside him under the very same roof. A few bricks covered with plaster suffice, and the man who breathes at six inches from us, is in our eyes as if he had no existence. The partition walls separate hearts as well as apartments. We may hear on the other side sobs or laughter, songs or threats; it is for us only so much noise. The good neighbour is he, of whose propinquity we are never conscious, who inhabits his house as if it were his

sepulchre. The perfect neighbour would certainly be a corpse, if it did not terrify us !

I have never succeeded in thus confining myself within the four walls of my apartment ; in spite of myself, I become associated in thought with the persons who move within my immediate circle ; it seems to me as if there existed between us the bond of a common hospitality. Here are we assembled for a few hours at the same caravansery ; we share the protection of the same roof, and the same light of heaven ; the wreaths of smoke from our hearths mingle, our voices resound together. Shall we brush by each other without at least expressing so much as the mutual wish of the Red Indians when they meet in their lonely prairies, “A blue sky and plenty of beavers’ skins” ?

The difficulty, no doubt, is to translate the savage wish into the language of civilisation ! To know what sort of sky one’s neighbour prefers, and what kind of beaver it is he hunts.

I asked Mr. Baptiste this morning for some information on the subject.

The new comer, it appears, is a Mr. Becherel ; he holds some minor municipal appointment here, and he was engaged upon the last district census. So that, in fact, I have already had some business with him, as it was he who paid me an official visit some time ago, which I made a note of in my diary.

Mr. Baptiste tells me that he has recently married a

young person from his native place, and that she never goes out or speaks to any one. She is dreaming, doubtless, in the soft light of that early honeymoon, whose beams are only observed in all their splendour amid silence and solitude. I breathed a heartfelt benediction on the young couple.

On scrutinising the husband more closely yesterday, however, I perceived that he is no longer young ; his face has a sulky expression, and there is something forlorn and repulsive about his appearance altogether. He seems to have two left sides, and nothing on him is made as it should be, or is in its right place. When I meet him he hesitates about saluting me ; and, on my bowing first, he either bows too stiffly or too low in return. Mr. Baptiste, who has a theory to explain everything, pretends that this arises from his face being pitted with small-pox, and his being a public servant. The small-pox marks have made him timid, and his official duties have given him a sense of importance. This will account, according to my philosopher, for the collector's mixture of awkwardness and pride. Be that as it may, I now feel more curious to become acquainted with Madame Becherel.

14th. . . . I look in vain through my parlour windows towards those of my neighbour. Everything is closed and silent. The blinds seem glued to the windows. A laugh or a song is never heard. I remark this to Mr. Baptiste, who merely draws from it the conclusion that the married couple are re-

served, and have not got good voices ; but I begin to suspect that their honeymoon may, after all, be but a cloudy one.

25th. . . . At length I observe a little variety on the part of our neighbours. For the last two days a cage has been hung out of their bedroom window, and a young bullfinch sings there. From time to time the window is softly opened ; a hand is put forth with some little tit-bit for the bird, then withdrawn, and the window is closed again without my being able to catch a glimpse of the donor's face.

I put my own canaries outside the window, that they, at any rate, may become neighbourly with the bullfinch ; and thus it is that they arrive at a mutual understanding. They approach the bars of their cages ; they look at each other with their little heads on one side ; they twitter, they flap their wings : the ice is broken ; they have evidently become acquainted ; shortly, no doubt, they will communicate to each other their domestic affairs.

The bullfinch, in his quality of bachelor, is the most demonstrative ; he is longing to pay a visit to his neighbours, and seeks for some mode of egress while flying about the cage on every side. He dashes himself at length against the bars, and falls to the bottom uttering little plaintive cries.

The blind is then suddenly raised, and I perceive through the panes of glass a face which appears not

unknown to me. At length the window is opened. Surely I cannot be deceived? I have seen those features before. . . . Yes. . . . It is the niece of the old proprietor whom Roger and I visited a few months ago—the miser forced to pay the postage of his letter.

She doubtless recognises me also, for she bows respectfully. I make a friendly signal with the hand and ask after Mr. \*\*\*\*; but, on observing her black dress, I suddenly recollect myself. She hastens to reply that her uncle is well.

“Pardon me,” I said to her. “Your mourning alarmed me.” She changed colour.

“I wear mourning for my mother, sir,” she said, in a tone of voice in which I felt there was the trembling of tears.

And, as if fearing to let me see her emotion, she turned towards the cage and endeavoured to pacify her bullfinch by tender appeals.

I remark, with a smile, that he is weary of being alone, and propose to place the prisoners near each other. The young bride half consents, and I summon Mr. Baptiste, who conveys to her my canaries.

The two cages are suspended close together outside the window, and the birds express their joy by fluttering their wings, and a double amount of chirping. My neighbour thanks me. I bow to her, and close the window.

I had forgotten this niece of Mr. \*\*\*\*, but, on

again seeing her, the interest revives which I felt at our first interview. Although I have as yet only caught a glimpse of her, and that at a distance, it strikes me that she looks dejected and very pale. Now, all that silence and repose, which I regarded as the indications of happiness, seem to me to have a different signification. I long to assure myself of the fact.

*30th. . . .* I have just called on my neighbours. It was necessary for me to wait until Sunday, as that is the only day when the husband is at home.

Mr. Becherel, to whom his young wife had mentioned our former acquaintance, appeared at once embarrassed and gratified. He is a timid man, not from want of energy, but from a consciousness of his defects. Some hurried gestures, which he could not restrain, the quick movements of his eyes, and, above all, the constant contraction of his brow, made me suspect him to be a man of very violent temper. His whole manner is forced, indicating the restraint exercised by a person who fears himself. I have always suspected people who, like wandering monks, walk with their eyes on the ground, their hands crossed on their breasts, and their lips constantly closed ; a calm produced with so much effort makes me dread what may be hidden beneath. The tones of Mr. Becherel's voice, when addressing his young wife, are gentle, though measured ; he does not look at her when speaking, and two or three times, on his displaying

rather more energy than usual, I saw her start ; so that I left them with a feeling of oppression. Within that house there exists an atmosphere indescribably freezing, but beneath which one feels a tempest to be lurking.

I again questioned Mr. Baptiste cautiously as to the manner in which our neighbours live, but he has not been able to tell me anything further. The husband is diligent and regular in his habits, his wife sedentary ; they are never heard to raise their voices ; the tradesmen are paid punctually. They are, in a word, respectable people — a common expression which may cover every sort of torture and discord, provided these occasion no noise. How many are there of these “respectable people” who, after having long saluted you in passing with a formal bow, cease one day to appear, and their room, on the door being forced open, reveals to the world a corpse lying beside a pan of charcoal ashes !

But I may after all have set too much value on a few unimportant observations. An analytical turn of mind is like a magnifying-glass set before the physical eye ; it exaggerates details : we look at the proboscis of a fly, and imagine it to be an elephant ! I will not be hasty in judging. My neighbours have invited me to come in again and see them ; I will reserve my opinion until I know them better.

*June 4th.* . . . Mr. Baptiste said to me this morning with a smile, as he saw me preparing to visit the Becherels :

"It is very fortunate, sir, that you have arrived at the canonical age as it is called."

"Why so, I asked?"

"Because, if you were younger, sir, you would not be received there," replied he; "Mr. Becherel is as jealous as a tiger!"

I was on the point of asking him where he had learned this; but it occurred to me that my former questions had already directed his attention too much to our neighbours, and that my curiosity might become a pretext on his part for establishing a sort of espionage. I accordingly hastened to change the subject.

He made a gesture expressive of surprise, and then appeared to fall into a reverie.

"After all, the expression is probably incorrect," he gravely added; "having very little acquaintance with the habits of tigers, I am not in a position to defend it. I only wished to say, sir . . . ."

"That my age gives me privileges!" I immediately interposed, in order to put a stop to further discussion. I know it, Mr. Baptiste, I know it, and for a long time past my chief care has been to pass those privileges in review. White hairs are a crown which gives us the right to claim confidence and respect, and has no fear of revolutions. Believe me, then, that I fully estimate the advantages of my regal position."

Upon this I took up my hat and set forth to visit the new household. I found everything in its usual order; but I was more than ever struck with the

sombreness which reigns in the midst of so much calm. Mr. Becherel is entirely occupied with the duties of his position ; he resumes them at home in the morning before going to the office, he continues them at night after his return, he wears himself out with work on Sundays. The sound of his pen, ruler, or penknife continues without cessation, whilst his young wife stitches in silence near the window. With both, labour appears to be resorted to neither as a duty nor a pleasure, but solely as a refuge. I asked them if they took any walks together. Never ! If they did not read to each other ? Never ! If they did not occasionally see some friends or relations ? No, never. I felt convinced that if I could have asked them if they had at least, as a substitute for these resources, the common hopes and desires of humanity, they would both have made me the same reply. Who and what then are these two beings petrified in each other's presence, but within whose bosoms there still appear to exist some powerful emotions ?

When I look at that young creature moping over her work, her head bent down, her hands listless, her figure drooping, I long to bid her rouse herself and live. Twenty times I have been on the point of questioning her ; but when she raises her head, I hesitate before those stony eyes fixed vacantly on space. Their dull light makes me think of sombre subterranean lakes unruffled by a breath of air —

mirrors from which no cloud, no ray of sunshine, is ever reflected.

Mr. Becherel is not less impenetrable, though apparently less calm: their two souls are equally pent up, the one by an immovable and brilliant glacier, the other by triple bars of iron which grate in their sockets.

*July 3rd.* . . . How is it that difficulties and mystery act always as spurs to us? Suppose my neighbours were gay and open, like the rest of the world; I should have enjoyed their society in a quiet way, without troubling myself above measure to bear them in mind. But I discover them to be strange and reserved, and accordingly they occupy all my thoughts. Romantic curiosity, which age cannot cure! Whether children or old men, shall we never have an appetite but for dishes under covers?

I believe I am at length on the verge of a discovery. Mr. Becherel has had occasion to consult me on a point of law which affects his interests. It relates to the affairs of his late mother-in-law, who died insolvent—if I have rightly understood him—and whose debts have recently been paid in full. Certain measures have to be taken to ascertain the existence of any assets. These I explained to my neighbour. On my asking him who had become responsible for the debts of the deceased, he answered, with a degree of embarrassment, that it was his wife's uncle—that very miser

whose acquaintance Roger and I had made some months previously. Can it, then, be that "Har-pagon" has become jealous of the family honour? Who can tell? The only logic of mankind is—contradiction.

When I mentioned the subject to Madame Becherel, she turned pale, but confirmed the state-  
ment of her husband. It seemed to me, however,  
that she spoke too coldly of her uncle's generosity.  
There was not a single expression of gratitude or of  
tenderness on her part. Is it, I wonder, because a  
benefit has far less value in itself, than from the  
manner in which it is conferred? A glass of water  
offered to us with a few sympathetic words, creates a  
deeper impression than even the shedding of blood  
on our behalf in a forbidding manner. What  
touches us in a gift is its spontaneity: a favour  
bestowed as a matter of business leaves, in general,  
only a feeling of pain at our having been obliged to  
accept it.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### ARMAND VERIFIES THE PROVERB THAT THE ABSENT ARE ALWAYS IN THE WRONG.

OLD Bouvier has been to see me ; he brought with him a quantity of flowers and some honey-comb the produce of his own hives ; but the good old fellow seemed to me to be out of spirits—an unusual occurrence with him. I begged him to tell me if anything unpleasant had occurred at home.

“ What do you imagine, then, could happen to me ? ” exclaimed he, with a sigh ; “ my day is past, Mr. Raymond. My life is like wine drawn down to the lees ; you may let it run off now without troubling yourself about what will become of it. No ! I am thinking of Armand.”

“ Your nephew,” I interposed ; “ is he then not satisfied with his position ? Has he any complaint to make of his pupil ? ”

Father Bouvier shook his head.

"It is not that, sir; for that, indeed, would be nothing. If one situation does not suit, why you can look out for another. As long as a bird has his wings, you know, he can fly somewhere; but if you cut them off with a pair of scissors, good-bye, then, for all is over! Now Armand's wings are, at this moment, cut to the very bone."

"What do you mean? Does your nephew no longer feel the honourable ambition which induced him to leave his home? Is he no longer sustained by his attachment?"

"That is all over, Mr. Raymond, all over!" cried the old man, with his eyes full of tears.

"You recollect the young woman's relatives refused their consent to the marriage until Armand should have saved a certain sum of money. . . . Accordingly, he went away to earn it. It was also arranged that he should write and receive a letter every week. His first letter was duly posted, then another, and then another after that; but he received no answer. Alarmed at this, he wrote to her relatives. Still the same silence, sir. It went on thus for three months, Armand saying to himself: 'The addresses must have been indistinct. . . . The post is badly conducted abroad. . . . We are travelling from city to city, and her letters, perhaps, are following me;' in fact, everything he could think of to avoid being driven to despair; but at length every

conceivable reason was exhausted, and then he wrote to me."

"Well?"

"Why, I went immediately to inquire what was going on. . . . You will hardly believe me, Mr. Raymond, but on approaching her house my knees trembled; I said to myself, 'I shall find the place hung with black, or it may be they will tell me the young girl was laid in her grave some time ago.' All nonsense, sir; she had not even been ill."

"You saw her, then?"

"No, not herself; she was ashamed to see me, no doubt . . . but they gave me a message from her: that she had come to the conclusion that Armand would find too much difficulty in gaining the necessary amount of money . . . that she did not wish to blight his future prospects . . . that he might make a rich marriage abroad . . . you understand, sir; the usual language of those who intend to break their plighted word. As for me, I returned home sick at heart. I wrote to Armand, and, as ill-luck would have it, my letter miscarried; so that he only received it at Venice. He immediately sent off a reply, enclosing a letter which I was charged to deliver into the girl's own hands. . . . There were only a few lines, sir; but they would have made a murderer weep. . . . I set off immediately, and reached her house; but . . ."

Father Bouvier stopped ; his emotion overpowered him. I looked up inquiringly.

"But I found no one there !" added he, hurriedly.

"What," cried I, "had the young girl gone away ?"

"Yes, worse than that, sir," said he, in a broken voice . . . "She was . . . married !"

I could not repress an exclamation of painful surprise. Armand's uncle raised his hands, then dropped them on his knees in the utmost dejection.

"Married !" continued he, looking before him into vacancy.

"In fact, a week previous to my call ! At my very first visit, the affair was already arranged, the very preparations must have been completed !"

"And has Armand been informed of this ?"

"I wrote to him immediately . . . I cannot now tell what . . . anything, indeed, that came at the moment into my head."

"He replied to you ?"

"Yes, by return of post. But only these few words : 'You remain to me, dear uncle ; I shall still be happy in living for you.'

Here the old man stopped ; tears choked his utterance. I myself was moved ; I took his hand :

"Come, Father Bouvier," said I, "do not lose courage. You see, your nephew sets you an example. I trust he has persevered in his resolution."

"Yes, sir, yes," exclaimed he, drying his eyes with his hard wrinkled hand, down which the tears

trickled, “Armand continues to write to me . . . even oftener than before . . . and his letters are full of noble expressions. I thought, sir, you might like to see them, and have brought them for that purpose.”

He drew from his coat an old pocket-book, bound round several times with a leather strap; this he slowly unwound, and took from the inside a small packet folded up in a piece of newspaper and tied with riband; this packet contained his nephew’s letters, which he handed to me with a mingled feeling of emotion and respect. I open them one after the other; and as I perceive the good fellow is anxious to hear their contents, I read them aloud. He listens in rapture, interrupting me every minute by a cry of admiration or of sympathy.

To tell the truth, Armand’s letters merit perusal. Through all their grief, one can detect the fortitude of a valiant soul. The young man yields to his disappointment the place only which it deserves; he passes over it rapidly as a soldier would cross a position exposed to grape-shot, and then resume his regular and habitual step.

But this victory over himself does not deceive us; beneath his courageous submission a profound and engrossing sorrow is apparent; each word seems the result of an effort; his very calm itself, unrest; it is like the smile of a sick man desirous of concealing his agony, but who cannot hide his pallor. He speaks to old Bouvier of his approaching return with M. de

Rovère's grandson, but only to start afresh. If one may credit him, he has acquired a taste for travelling, and enjoys the ever-changing scenes, the bustle, and the variety of customs he meets with. But I feel convinced that he seeks excitement only in order to escape from his own thoughts : happiness loves to dwell in tranquillity, and shrinks from contact with crowds.

Father Bouvier has begged me to write to Armand ; he thinks that a few words of encouragement from me will promote his restoration. I have promised to do my best. Age facilitates a task of the kind ; it permits one to speak on all subjects with the authority of experience, and in the tranquil tones of the past. Having escaped from the mighty conflict of the passions, I have now nothing left but its scars. People may confide in us old men without blushing, because we have experienced all before ; and without fear, because we have entered upon the calm of eventide. Time has accomplished in our favour what a super-human effort alone can do for the priest at confession. We have no longer sex, worldly interests, or repressed fires ; our whole being has become imbued with peace, and we feel ourselves henceforth justified in remaining neutral amidst all the controversies on earth.

It becomes us, however, to preserve this privilege intact, in order to derive profit from it for others as well as for ourselves.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

A STORM—AN OLD MAN'S ADVENTURE—WHAT WE MAY ACCOMPLISH IN A BARN DURING A SHOWER.

JULY 7th . . . I have just taken Father Bouvier the letter, which I had written to be forwarded to his nephew. Mr. Baptiste accompanied me. For some time past walking has fatigued me more and more; my breath fails me, my legs yield under me; to mount the inclines I require the assistance of an arm, in addition to my stick.

The sky was overcast; immense clouds, as white as snow, remained stationary in the horizon; the air was heavy, while hot puffs of wind swept in succession over the corn-fields, making the ears sway to and fro like the waters of a lake, but without agitating the trees, which stood out as motionless and distinct as if they had been painted in dark green on the sky beyond.

We slowly reached Bouvier's little cottage, where

I left my letter ; but the fear of an impending storm made us hasten our steps homewards.

The white clouds still continued motionless ; but on the right some other clouds of a leaden hue were advancing from a distance beyond them ; the thunder began to murmur. I stopped involuntarily to admire the imposing spectacle which presented itself before my eyes. From the top of the hill on which we stood, the entire horizon appeared like a vast battle-field spread out for the forces of nature. The sombre clouds continued to advance like an attacking army. On the flank of these formidable masses the wind, which was now rising, drove forward paler clouds that might be regarded as squadrons of light cavalry ; behind these roared the artillery of the sky, the echoes of which reverberated from hill to hill. Whilst I was observing these preliminaries of the contest, Mr. Baptiste, who prudently thought of his feet, called my attention to the birds flying rapidly for shelter, to the cattle herding together, and the peasants hastily collecting their tools preparatory to going home. He made me observe that there was no dwelling near us, and that we ran the risk of being overtaken by the storm in the open country. The warning was prudent ; I took his arm, and began to hasten forward at once, not however without often raising my eyes to follow the strategic movements of my two atmospheric armies.

The white clouds slowly began a retreat, but the

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vanguard, which was hastening to oppose them, delayed not the attack, the rest of the clouds followed, and a fierce engagement ensued. The two masses rushed one against the other and became intermingled. I saw successive portions of dark clouds penetrate the white and divide them, like battalions hurled into the thick of the battle, cutting a passage through the enemy. The thunder, which had grown louder, roared in furious peals, at ever-decreasing intervals. Flashes of lightning flooded the horizon with dazzling light; at length a peal of thunder resembling the echo of distant artillery filled the atmosphere, and large hailstones began to patter around us on the trees and bushes.

Mr. Baptiste looked about for a place of shelter, but he could discover only clumps of trees dotted here and there between the cultivated fields; the suburbs of the town being still a great way off. The hail quickly dissolved, and was succeeded by a storm of rain, and the large drops beating down thicker each moment, fell noisily on the one solitary umbrella we had brought with us. My scrupulous companion was seized with real dismay.

" You will get wet, sir," said he, observing some splashes which already stained my summer over-coat; " the road will soon be quite soaking, and then you will slip in descending the hill. I ought to have looked to the weather, and have warned you, sir, not to go out this morning."

" It is I, rather, who should have thought of that, Mr. Baptiste," I replied, gaily, " and it is but right for me to put up with the consequences of my rashness ; I only regret having involved you in them. A courtier, once, overtaken by a shower while walking with Louis XIV., affirmed that the rain at Versailles did not wet any one ; but such is far from being the case with the rain here, for I see you are already dripping. Do not hold the umbrella over me only, I beg, and let us hasten on."

I made an effort to step out quickly ; but the storm, as if it had some personal rancour against us, immediately increased in violence. Sheets of water suddenly obscured the light and beat against us. The rain-drops were no longer to be distinguished ; it was rather a cascade pouring down ; broad rivulets, created as if by magic, began to intersect the roadway and leap down the inclines, our progress became more and more difficult ; I felt my breath failing me, when shouts with which my own name was mingled made us turn our heads, and on our right we perceived, half hidden by some elder-bushes, a low-roofed barn, whence the voices issued.

Mr. Baptiste and I turned quickly towards the asylum which now presented itself, and arrived quite out of breath.

Twenty young voices welcomed us with exclamations of sympathy and delight ; I recognised the pupils of the Misses Normand. Surprised like our-

selves by the storm, they had found refuge in this dilapidated barn.

The two ladies hastened to make room for me in the most sheltered corner. The little girls sought me out a rustic seat, and spread their umbrellas in front so as to prevent the gusts of rain and wind from approaching me. I feel that it is my grey hairs which give me a title to all these attentions : a young man would have been suffered to pass on through the tempest ; the old man was invited in and sheltered.

I determine on at least repaying my welcome with good humour. I ask the Misses Normand their pupils' names ; and I recognise several. I inquire after their grand-parents with whom I associated in former years. This leads me back to incidents of my youth, which I relate. We smile at each other, we become acquainted ; the boldest reply to my questions at first, then they interrogate me.

The silence which my arrival occasioned is soon broken by a dozen voices at once, followed by bursts of laughter and shouts of joy. Life overflows at that blooming period of childhood, and finds fresh excitement from being shut in beneath the flood of rain which envelopes us—for the storm still continues. Although the thunder has receded to a distance, the cataracts of heaven remain open. Our captivity threatens to prolong itself. But what is to be done in the contracted space this barn affords ? I am grieved to see so much activity without occupation, and

joy without any object ; I impose silence, therefore, with a movement of my hand, and bid them all approach. They run forward. And here am I surrounded by a garland of rosy faces, like those old mountain pines one sees, growing in the midst of a girdle of rhododendrons in flower. I propose to them a game of my childhood now almost forgotten and lost ; for games have also their revolutions ; they are only symbols of the activity of the hour, and of its predilections. Mine is a souvenir of the reign of Louis XVI. ; it was called the “ Game of the Insurgents.” The leader calls out a particular phrase with a gesture of defiance against some hostile country, each member of the circle repeats the formula and the gesture ; then the leader of the game adds a new word and a grimace, to be imitated afresh. The fun is caused by the confusion which ensues in the end between the words and signs differently reproduced. Peals of laughter never fail to arise amidst so many tripping tongues and so many figures in motion.

It happened so now. The mirth of the young girls rose to regular transports. They danced about with that feverish joy which is felt only at their age. Every eye was suffused with tears of laughter. I felt myself grow young again in the midst of their gaiety.

As soon as the game was over, the bolder ones came to thank me ; the rest looked at me with an expression which conveyed more than words could do.

In the meanwhile the thunder had ceased, the clouds had dispersed, and a rainbow appeared, spread out over the horizon like a triumphal arch, to celebrate the victory of the sun.

The latter had just shone forth in all his glory, pursuing with his golden arrows the remnants of mist and storm which were flying towards the west. The furrows in the road were all washed bare by the torrents, and the birds recommenced their song amidst the branches of the trees, while fluttering their drooping wings.

We all set out together upon the high road leading to the town. The youngest girls ran on before, cautioning us against the worst parts of the road, and pointing out the stones which served as bridges over the miniature streams ; the Misses Normand and the elder girls surrounded me, while the rear-guard, composed of the gayest of the party, followed us with a chorus of shouts, bursts of laughter, songs, and exclamations.

I reached home thus borne along, so to speak, in a triumphal march. I seemed to return into the town with spring and youth. The whole school would accompany me to my very door, and left only after repeated acknowledgments. Several compelled me to accept their nosegays, and I entered the house with both hands buried in flowers, and my heart refreshed by their innocent joy.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

A LONG-DEFERRED INHERITANCE—A RECOGNITION.

**M**ADEMOISELLE RENAUD is dying, and is most anxious to see her godson Armand. He was expected to return in a month. I wrote to him to hasten his journey, if possible. He arrived yesterday, and was just in time to see the poor paralysed sufferer once more; but she had lost the power of speech, and all her efforts to make herself understood by him were fruitless. From a number of inarticulate sounds he could only catch the name of Mr. Lebrun. She was no doubt desiring him to communicate with a lawyer of that name who is concerned in her affairs. Armand will call on him. . . .

We followed Mademoiselle Renaud this morning to her last home. On seeing the corpse (scarcely more a corpse than before) borne from that dark and silent room to occupy a plot beneath the sun, in the

midst of the flowers of the cemetery, I could not repress a conviction that the change was a gain for her.

Armand is much distressed at his loss. Every blow, indeed, is overwhelming to a wounded spirit. The only relative he has left now is Father Bouvier, whose back is bent beneath the weight of years. This morning we took a walk together, and I strove to give encouragement by reminding him that he was young and strong. I pointed out to him, at a corner of the road, a honeysuckle in full bloom, and said :

“ See ! there is an emblem of yourself.”

“ Yes,” replied he, quickly ; “ but the honeysuckle is leaning against an old ruin, which must soon overwhelm it in its fall.”

I said no more. There are diseased minds, like diseased digestions ; the lightest nourishment upsets them, and everything turns to poison.

The truth is, that Armand cannot forget his unfortunate attachment ; he had founded all his hopes of the future upon it, and now it occupies all his thoughts of the past. At his age, it seems impossible for anything to have an end ; we date all our affections from eternity. When I speak to him of time, which heals the most cruel wounds, he smiles sadly ; for time is a physician in whom we repose confidence only, after having given him a long trial. In old age we are forced to believe in his skill, when we count the scars on our hearts. . . . .

Armand has just called on me, greatly excited.

He came direct from Mr. Lebrun, who announced to him the existence of a will, in which Mademoiselle Renaud names him heir of all she possessed. It would be a small matter for others, but for our orphan it is a fortune. He has shown me the certificates of the investments which the lawyer has handed to him.

"You see," said I, taking his hand, "that every one has his turn of good fortune, and days which, according to Horace, 'ought to be noted in white chalk under the images of his household gods.' You are become a rich man, my dear Armand."

"Too late!" exclaimed he, with a sigh.

I knew that he was thinking still of the broken engagement, and sought to change the subject; but he returned to it more earnestly and more openly than he had ever done before. He related to me the projects formed in company with her, whom he had hoped to associate with his future life; all their household plans, a thousand times repeated, their youthful anticipations, and their day-dreams.

I listened to the murmuring of that hymn of youth, the accents of which I still recognised, as we recognise the notes of some well-known air that has charmed us long ago. We were both leaning on our elbows at the same window; the birds sang near us in their cages decorated with flowers, Armand held in one hand the documents which had just opened for him the ivory gate of his blissful visions, and his eyes wandered in the court-yard below with a sort of fasci-

nation. He continued to indulge in his dream. He spoke of the young girl's tastes, repeated her sayings, described her features. Suddenly he stopped with a cry. I observed him start, grow pale; he pointed with his finger towards my young neighbour, whose sweet face had just appeared behind the window.

"That is she!" he exclaimed.

"What, Madame Becherel?" cried I.

"Yes, yes; that is her husband's name. She here! Ah! I can . . . I must see her!"

He had made a movement towards the door; I held him back.

"It is impossible," said I; "all is now over between you; an explanation will lead to nothing, and will add to the misery of both. Leave the young wife to her duties, Armand, and rise equal to your own."

He did not reply, but leaned out of the window to catch, if possible, another sight of her. She had, fortunately, disappeared.

I drew him from the window, and forced him to sit down. I endeavoured to talk to him, but he scarcely listened; his eyes were continually directed towards the window opposite. He interrupted me every moment by repeating:

"She there! she there!"

At last I seized both his hands, drew him towards me, and compelled him to listen.

After having said all that I felt upon the necessity of his not again seeing my young neighbour, and of

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his departure from the neighbourhood even, for some considerable time, I sought to obtain from him a promise to that effect, but he interrupted me.

“At least tell me that she is happy?” he demanded, with a voice full of emotion.

I was unwilling to express any doubt, yet I could not be false to my convictions, so I tried to avoid the subject.

“I must find it out!” he exclaimed; “I am determined to know the truth.”

On my raising fresh objections, he started up, and after thanking me for my advice in faltering tones, hurried away, without having pledged his word to anything.

. . . It is now five days since I saw Armand. I have again called on my neighbours. No change seems to have taken place with them. The young wife continues as dejected as ever, her husband as reserved. I can no longer doubt that there has arisen one of those walls of ice between them, which grows stronger only with time. . . .

Yesterday evening I again returned to the Becherels. She had been weeping: his eyes were more hollow, and his expressions more abrupt, than ever. What, then, has occurred? Can Armand be at all connected with this? Under any circumstances I must see him again, and will send a letter to Father Bouvier, where he is staying, and beg him to come over to me immediately.

. . . What a terrible day this has been! but at length it is over; all are gone; I am alone, and can collect my thoughts and review what has passed.

Towards mid-day Baptiste came into my room, to announce that Madame Becherel was waiting in the hall, and requested to speak to me. This was the first time she had called on me alone, and I anticipated something unusual. I went out to receive her, and led her into my study.

She was trembling violently; I did my best to reassure her, by saying how much pleasure it would give me to serve her in any way. She tried to thank me, but tears choked her utterance. I waited for her to relieve her bursting heart, and then besought her to speak.

"It is very difficult for me to do so," faltered she, "but it must be done. . . . Yes, yes, I will tell you all."

Still, however, she paused. I tried to assist her by asking if the motive of her call was not connected with some one of my acquaintance. She started.

"Ah! you know, then?" cried she; "indeed—indeed, I wish to speak to you—concerning . . ."

"Mr. Armand Bouvier?"

She blushed deeply, and bowed assent.

"So you know that he has returned?" I began.  
"He has seen you again?"

"Me? oh no, no!" cried she, rapidly, "but the other day I thought I recognised him at your

window . . . still I was in doubt . . . when Mr. Becherel informed me himself of his arrival."

"Your husband? Did he know him?"

"By name only, until Mr. Armand had occasion, the other day, to obtain some papers from the office relating, I believe, to the property of his aunt; so that Mr. Becherel saw him, and is angry at his being here."

"Has he been made acquainted, then . . .?"

"With everything," interposed she, quickly. "Before consenting to marry Mr. Becherel, I felt bound to tell him all. . . . I hoped that my frankness would have won his confidence . . . but no . . . ever since he has known of Mr. Armand's arrival he has not had an hour's peace; he hurries home from his office several times a day, to assure himself that I have not gone out, that no one has been to the house; he questions, he suspects me. But this distrust tortures and humiliates me, sir; I feel that I cannot endure it patiently; that I shall soon begin to hate Mr. Becherel. . . . Oh, it is wicked, very wicked, I know; I ought rather to pity and reassure him. That is why I wished to see you. You know Mr. Armand; he will listen to your advice. . . . Oh, then, if he has any compassion for me, implore him not to seek an interview, not to write to me, for . . . he has written lately, sir . . . a letter in which he begs me to see him, and promises that it shall be for once only; for the last time."

"And you have replied?" I demanded.

"Not a word! but I ought to have destroyed his letter, burned it; and I do not know why . . . I kept it; . . . and since yesterday I cannot find the letter anywhere: I tremble to think that Mr. Becherel may have discovered it. Dear sir! in the name of all you love, save me from this misery. Mr. Armand assured me that he would quit the place after one interview. Bid him go at once: I beg it of him as a favour, and entreat you to obtain his consent."

Her eyes were suffused with tears, and her hands clasped with an expression of such agonised entreaty, that I felt quite overcome. I was about making an effort to console her, when we heard the noise of footsteps in the passage. I had forgotten to say I was engaged, and Madame Becherel rose in alarm at being thus surprised in tears. At this moment some one knocked at the study door. I rose to prevent any intrusion; but too late. The door was thrown open, and Madame Becherel started back with a cry:—it was Armand himself.

He had received my letter, and hastened here at the summons. Being informed by Baptiste that Madame Becherel was with me, he was induced to profit by the occasion.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

ON THE DANGER OF PLAYING THE PART OF CONFIDENT (EXCEPT ON THE STAGE)—A JEALOUS HUSBAND—PEACE FOR THE WELL-DISPOSED.

**A**RMAND closed the door firmly behind him, and stopped in front of it: he looked very pale and agitated.

“I was going to tell you, Armand, that I could not receive you just at the present moment,” I said, stepping forward to meet him.

“Pardon me . . . Mr. Raymond” . . . faltered he—without daring to look at the young wife, who had sunk into a chair—“but since fate has brought me here . . . allow me to remain. . . . I had given up all hope of this interview. . . . God has granted it to me. . . . Do not rob me of this last consolation.”

And without waiting for a reply, he approached

Madame Becherel, and added with a degree of bitterness :

“ I hope that you, madam, will not refuse to listen to me under such circumstances . . . the presence of Mr. Raymond should reassure you. . . . It is, at least, a guarantee that I shall say nothing which you ought not to hear.”

“ And what have you to hope for from an interview of this kind ?” I interposed ; “ Madame Becherel implores you to spare her from so much needless suffering.”

“ No !” exclaimed the young man, with passion ; “ I am determined, happen what will, to find out on what grounds I have been doomed to abandonment ; why, in spite of so many promises, the letters I forwarded from the commencement of my journey have never been answered ?”

“ Your letters !” cried Madame Becherel ; “ did you, then, write to me ?”

“ What ! have you not received them ?” demanded he, vehemently.

“ Not one ; and after writing to you twice, I was obliged to stop, from not knowing your address.”

Armand pressed his forehead with both hands.

“ Ah ! I begin to see all !” cried he ; “ your uncle. Heaven punish him for it ! your uncle intercepted our letters. That is why he so readily consented to our corresponding ! He was certain beforehand that it would not interfere with his designs.”

I recollect at this moment the occurrence of the letter, the postage of which the miser had so unluckily paid. I mentioned the date and the particulars ; all Armand's and Madame Becherel's suspicions were confirmed ; they looked at each other, while one uttered an exclamation of anger, the other a cry of anguish.

" So," resumed the young man, with flashing eyes, " the truth is, that we have both been deceived ! You were induced to believe that I had forgotten you, just as I thought I was myself forgotten. And," he added, after a short pause, with vehemence—" and it must have been so in reality, for at the end of a few months you consented to become the wife of another."

" Ah ! if you only knew all," interposed she, in heartrending tones. " But why should I not tell you ? I have concealed nothing from him. I believed that I was forgotten ; I was assured that you had found some one in Italy more worthy of you ; the report of a rich marriage was spread about. . . ."

" So it was out of pique that you yourself accepted the first suitor ?"

" No, indeed. I refused a long while ; I should have refused till now if my mother's illness had not compelled me to yield."

" What do you mean ?"

" Do you not understand yet ?" cried the poor girl, sobbing. " Alas ! my uncle declared that, as long as I refused, nothing should be done for my

dying mother. I was forced by my submission to purchase her last comforts. I yielded . . . my mother died . . . and her funeral expenses were my bridal present."

She could utter no more. Armand, almost beside himself, gave full vent to his indignation. But suddenly he approached Louise, and, falling on his knees before her, asked pardon for having accused her.

I was on the point of interfering, when the sound of voices in altercation reached us from the next room. I distinguished that of Mr. Baptiste, who seemed less calm than usual; then another voice, which grew louder each moment. On hearing it, Madame Becherel whispered in alarm:

"My husband!"

It was indeed he who was trying to enter, in spite of Mr. Baptiste.

"I saw the young man go in!" cried he. "They must be here; I am positive of it. Ah! if I find them, woe to them both!"

We heard him in his rage strike the floor of the dining-room with his heavy walking-stick. Armand rose to his feet, and the young wife rushed towards me, imploring protection. The voices drew nearer. I began to fear some sudden act of violence which I might not be able to prevent. Not a moment was to be lost. I pushed Armand into my bedroom, and Madame Becherel into the little parlour. Just as I

had done so the door was opened violently, and the collector appeared on the threshold, his features quite distorted by passion. I advanced to meet him :

“ Was that you, neighbour, making so much noise ? ” I asked, quietly.

He gave no reply, but his eyes wandered restlessly about the room ; at length he cried :

“ There was some one here just now ; I heard you talking. Do not attempt to deny it.”

“ And why should I deny it, Mr. Becherel ? ” I said, in a firm tone.

He started.

“ You acknowledge, then. . . . It was they. . . . Where are they now ? I must have an immediate answer.”

I half smiled.

“ I beg your pardon, Mr. Becherel ; we appear to be assuming two characters here which I cannot admit,” said I to him. “ One would suppose you were a judge questioning a criminal. Be so good as to compose yourself, and recollect that you are in the house of a neighbour, who desires to do nothing at which you may take offence.”

While speaking thus, I drew an arm-chair towards him. He appeared somewhat moved ; his face grew red and pale by turns ; a struggle was evidently taking place between his feeling of respect and his anger ; the latter got the better for a moment.

“ I insist upon an answer ! ” cried he, stamping on

the floor. "A woman was here a minute ago . . . and she was not alone. . . . See, there is the proof." He pointed to Armand's hat lying on my desk, and observing the look of annoyance which I could not restrain. "You are caught, you see!" he added, coarsely. "Come, it is of no use to attempt concealment any longer. Bring them out, or I will drag them out myself."

He made a movement towards the door of the little parlour. I tried to stop him, but he was no longer master of himself, and repulsed me with a deep curse. I nearly fell, but Baptiste, who had remained in the room, uttered a cry of indignation, and caught me in his arms. The collector stopped, ashamed of his violence.

"It was unnecessary to show me that you had greater strength than an old man," said I to him; "and perhaps you should not have forgotten that you are beneath his roof."

"I beg pardon," he muttered, still hesitating between passion and shame; "but you ought to see that I am no longer able to control myself! . . . Ah! Mr. Raymond . . . you do not know!"

His voice began to falter, as if gentler feelings were gaining the mastery.

"You are mistaken," I said to him, in a sympathising tone; "I know that she who bears your name once hoped to have been the wife of another, but I also know that she honourably acquainted you

with this; that she has refused an interview which Mr. Armand Bouvier had requested; and that she came this very day to beg me to obtain his promise to quit the town, without any further solicitations on his part, and leave her wholly to her new duties."

"Is this indeed true?" cried Mr. Becherel, greatly moved.

"I know further," I added, "that she is deeply affected by your suspicions, that she is afraid of your violence, and that, without speaking of generosity, she has at least a right to expect compassion from you. You see I know all."

"No," murmured the collector, whose anger was now appeased, and who had thrown himself back into a chair, "no, sir, you do not know all, for she could not tell you what she herself was ignorant of . . . that I had always loved her, though in secret. Why, I knew her from quite a child, when I resided near her mother; but being poor, like herself, I dared not think of marrying. I went away to seek my fortune; I entered the town office here at first as a porter, then I became clerk, then chief clerk and head of the office. It took me twelve years to gain that step, sir. In the meanwhile I had seen Louise at rare intervals, but always without saying a word. . . . At length, when I thought myself in a position to ask her to share my home, I spoke out. But, alas! . . . I came too late, she loved another."

"And yet you persisted?"

“ Because that other had forgotten her.”

“ Who told you so?”

“ Her uncle, sir. . . . Nay, she herself. I could not have known it otherwise. I ought to have understood that treason to her first love would not render me more acceptable; that what it was in my power to bestow, would not prevent regrets for what she had lost; but then, seeing her so shamefully treated by that uncle of hers, who grudged her the very necessaries of life, I thought that my protection would, at all events, be more agreeable to her. She herself thought so, for, after an explanation, we agreed upon the matter; and I fancied, at length, that happiness was to be mine—wretched fool that I was! We have both brought ourselves to misery.”

“ How so?”

“ Yes, sir, I repeat it, to misery, for nothing I hoped for has come to pass. I said to myself that when once mine, Louise would grow a little friendly, that she would forget her former ideas. I was wrong: she has forgotten nothing. I was affectionate at first, and to please her I tried to be gay, but it was a useless attempt, sir! She remained as sad as ever: it would have been of as much use to try and restore a corpse to life. Then I confess my own patience gave way; I complained, too vehemently perhaps; but she did not comprehend that my anger was still a proof of my affection—she was aghast. At first I had only been indifferent to her, from that moment she

became alarmed. Ah ! sir, you do not know what it is, never to be able to speak without causing a shudder, to see always before you eyes red with weeping, to feel that your only power over a woman is to make her wretched. Oh, it is that which drives me mad ! Will you believe it, I have by turns been on the point of striking her, or of imploring her love on my bended knees. . . . But nothing, nothing, has had any effect . . . . her heart has remained sealed up with its image of the past. It was in vain for me to knock at the door ; she heard nothing. Then, but one resource was left to me : I turned dumb, and blind, and deaf ; I ceased to converse, excepting with my work ; I intoxicated myself with figures—as so many wretches do with brandy—to drown recollection. . . . But it was all in vain, sir ! the thorn still rankled in my heart !”

“ And you have never tried to make yourself understood by the woman whom you so love !” cried I, sincerely touched by his recital. “ Why not have spoken to her as you are speaking to me at the present moment ?”

“ Impossible, sir !” he replied ; “ she has too much power over me : a single glance of hers which seems to me dejected, a movement of the lips that I fancy conveys an expression of coldness, suffice to irritate or make a coward of me. . . . And besides, I fear that I might be betrayed into telling her certain matters, that I would have made her acquainted

with had she accepted me with a good grace, but which to tell her now would seem like a reproach."

I looked at him with an air which showed that I did not understand his allusions.

"Yes, indeed," continued he, with emotion, "I could tell her that if I had not saved her from the hands of her uncle, he would have forced her to marry their old neighbour who demanded her hand . . . that I was obliged to buy her from that miserable wretch . . . and to pay for everything that he had expended upon her mother . . . everything, down to the very stone now being prepared for her grave!"

"What! it is you?" cried I.

"Do not mention this, sir," interposed he, quickly; "Louise must never know it. . . . She would regret being under such an obligation to me."

At this moment we were interrupted by a cry; the door of my little parlour opened; and the young wife rushed towards Mr. Becherel, whose hands she seized and covered with kisses.

"No!" cried she, bursting into tears, "no, I shall not be so ungrateful as that! Ah! I have heard all. . . . I understand all now. . . . I have been wrong, very wrong. Will you forgive me, Henry?"

The collector started.

"She has called me Henry!" said he, pale with joy, and his lips trembling. . . . "Oh, say that word again!"

"Yes, Henry, yes, I will strive to become to you all that I ought to be."

He folded her in his arms with a murmur of joy, kissed her forehead and cheeks many times, then turning towards me, begged my pardon.

I took his hand and congratulated him ; adding my prayers for the future happiness of a union, which had its real beginning only from that hour ; I then conducted them both to the front door.

On my return, Armand was standing in the middle of the study, looking very pale, but very resolute.

"Has Mr. Raymond any commission for Germany?" he asked ; "I start to-morrow."

"Go, dear boy," said I, embracing him ; "go, with my blessing, and may God console thee!"

## CHAPTER XXXVI.\*

RENE AT HOME.

**F**ELICITE has obtained her goods on credit from Mr. Dutilleul, in accordance with my request. When I went to see her this morning I was received with a very avalanche of thanks. I tried in vain to persuade her that she ought to attribute the success of her plans, not to my patronage but solely to her own honesty and good name; and further, that she had concluded a commercial transaction, and in no

\* This and the following chapters were composed by M. Eugène Lesbazeilles, the son-in-law of Emile Souvestre, at the request of the French publishers, on the death of the latter. M. Lesbazeilles, it appears, was induced to undertake the task, from the fact of his intimate connexion with, and his deep affection for, Mr. Souvestre. In doing so he modestly disclaims any attempt to imitate the style, while believing that, from the above circumstances, he had become thoroughly acquainted with the sentiments and inner life of his author, which he has done his best to embody in the concluding pages of this work.

wise received a favour. She could not, however, resist the strong impulse of expressing her gratitude to some one, and the torrent of praise, forced at length to seek some other channel, burst forth in all its strength upon the head of Mr. Dutilleul. Why was I so obstinate in the attempt to undeceive her? Gratitude warms and rejoices the heart: it is even more sweet to him who feels it, than to the object of its regard.

While still continuing to talk with a volubility which I never knew her capable of before, Félicité had resumed her interrupted occupation of arranging the recently arrived groceries in her shop. A bibliomaniac could not have shown more care and affection in the classification of his precious volumes, than she displayed in setting out the canisters of coffee, and the jars of cloves and cinnamon. Her passion for order, to which my papers formerly were so often victims, turned the present opportunity of gratification to the fullest account, and she had accordingly instituted a general revolution in the interests of order and symmetry. Not a single article in the shop could escape from her determined plan of reform; although the greater number, after a minute inspection and repeated changes, had to resume the place from which they were temporarily deposed. Several times I was consulted on the more or less harmonious effect of this or that arrangement, and was forced to give my opinion with as much gravity, as if it were a question of the deepest interest to society.

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Behind the bright panes of the glazed door were suspended wax dolls and other children's toys ; the upright glass-case was reserved for the skeins of worsted, and ribands, which displayed thus their brilliant colours, cleverly disposed to the best advantage ; the counter was covered with bottles, standing in one place in rows, in another piled up in pyramids to the very ceiling. When her labours were completed, Félicité cast a look of pride and satisfaction over the whole ; in fact, the little shop presented a singularly bright and coquettish appearance, with its counters newly painted and varnished, its scales as bright as gold, and its nests of drawers displaying their labels in long rows of almost mathematical regularity.

At this moment Réne stepped in ; he rarely suffers a day to pass without finding some excuse to slip off to the shop in the suburbs, if it were only to tap the stone pavement with his stick in passing, or thrust his gratified face in at the half-open door. He had scarcely entered before an expression of astonishment spread over his features ; his eyes wandered in turn from the attractive articles which surrounded him, to her who seemed to have called them forth as by a magic wand. It was evident to me that his ever-increasing admiration was on the point of exploding, and that he was about to throw himself upon the neck of Félicité ; but my presence put a sudden stop to his first impulse, and an after-

thought appeared to complete his self-control. He said to himself, doubtless: "After all, this clever manager is only my wife; in the midst of this profusion of wealth I am 'at home,'" and, as if anxious to prove himself equal to his fortune, he advanced composedly towards the counter, gravely mounted the step which raised it from the floor, and sat himself down in the leathern arm-chair, where he crossed his legs and remained silent, assuming, at the same time, the most comical air of dignity possible.

In years gone by I should have smiled at this humble pair, whom so mediocre a fortune sufficed to enchant; and disdain, I fear, would have been the cause rather than good nature. In spite of the high opinion I formerly entertained of my intellectual emancipation, I was, in truth, impressed only by forms, I was gratified only by elegant pleasures; I confounded the lowly with the vulgar objects which surrounded them, and, not troubling myself to examine beneath the surface of things, I regarded both with the same indifference, and too often with the same contempt.

To what injustice and to how many privations such prejudices condemned me! Since then numerous social barriers have disappeared from my path, and I gather golden grain from a far more extensive field. The joys of the refined no longer impress and attract me solely. In the midst of the barley-sugar jars of the humble shopkeeper, I perceive and respond

to sentiments and emotions which refresh my heart. I no longer restrict my walks to the stately avenues of parks ; I explore also the city lanes, and reap there an equally fruitful harvest of the soul ; the flower growing by the hedge-side has bright colours and healthful odours, which do not delight me less than the softer tints and more delicate perfumes of the hothouse plant. And while I feel a larger sympathy myself, I inspire also more in others. When I cordially extended my hand just now to Réne and his wife, their eyes were moistened with tears. But stop ; it seems to me that I have been composing a eulogy on myself, though I protest that it is old age alone that I have intended to honour. And, after all, it has been the privilege of the aged from time immemorial to talk about themselves with a certain degree of consideration, for which they are not subjected to much blame. Nestor, in the *Iliad*, rarely opens his mouth excepting to congratulate himself on his virtues ; and Homer, instead of accusing the veteran of excess or of boasting, declares that words sweeter than honey flowed from his lips.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## COMPULSORY SOLITUDE.

*AUGUST 9th.*—Still suffering from the fatigue of my visit to Félicité yesterday, but attracted by the freshness of the air, I determined to start this morning and take Roger by surprise at his own house; after having scarcely accomplished a third of the walk, however, I was compelled to retrace my steps, and only succeeded in reaching home by resting several times on the way.

For some time past now, I have felt an extreme weariness on each occasion after walking out, but I have persisted in attributing it to a momentary derangement of the system. I am at length, however, forced to acknowledge that my strength is failing, and that walking will soon become impossible for me altogether. At the first thought of this, I must confess that the anticipation of an indefinitely prolonged imprisonment, the prospect of remaining

eternally confined to my own room, greatly affected me. I began to think with pain and regret on the public walk shaded by trees, where every day my favourite seat awaited me. It seemed to me that the sight of the accustomed spots, the gossips, not perhaps appealing much to the affections, or higher feelings, but easy and familiar, with one's companions in age and leisure—who from morning to night form under the same lime-trees a permanent group, constantly being renewed—I felt as if all this were indispensable to my existence ; and I could not help bitterly accusing old age, which seemed about to reduce me to the loneliness of isolation and abandonment.

But how is this ? I have never spent my hours more agreeably or more profitably than during the past day.

Hardly had I reclined motionless for a few minutes in my arm-chair before a light, as it were, diffused itself over my dejected soul ; my spirits, for the moment depressed, became gradually raised by an inner and spontaneous power. I began to contemplate the objects that surround me, and with which I am henceforth to live on almost exclusive terms of intimacy, with a more attentive, more sympathetic eye ; and lo ! everything has become clothed with a fresh aspect, and with a charm previously unsuspected. The sun's rays which entered my room by the open window and illumined the

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carpet with a golden border, struck me as having a brilliancy and a glory that I had never remarked before. A pot of mignonette stands upon my desk, on which formerly, before going out or on my return, I hardly bestowed a passing glance, now I take a singular pleasure in examining it; I look with admiration, almost gratitude, towards this little homely flower, which exhales its perfumed breath around me with such generous profusion, with such untiring energy.

Hence I perceive that it is from lack of perception and good will, that we do not derive more enjoyment from the many precious objects spread around us. If we thought only of gathering up those scattered particles, as the diamond-cutter his diamond dust; to sum up all the blessings which enrich our original poverty, we should find an abundant supply of subjects to gladden us and to engage our love. Inattention, indifference to others, and apathy, divide betwixt them the dominion over our minds: as they have not the stout appearance of the active vices, these defects escape our moral vigilance, and exert their pernicious influence in secret. They are enemies on whom I shall henceforth keep a vigilant eye; and shall strive to conquer, now that age, having deprived me of external resources, leaves me more exposed to their subtle attacks.

But it is my books above all else which have suddenly grown dearer to me; books which a short time

ago were no more to me than so many volumes, ornaments, pieces of furniture even, have become, as it were, endowed with life; the spirit enshrined within their pages has come forth to meet my own; I have found in them inquirers who have communicated to me their thoughts; friends who have taken possession of me, and introduced me into the inner circle of their lives. Incomparable society, ever ready to receive me; inexhaustible friendship, which will never fail me, which waits only for my own invitation to afford me sympathy and delight!

With Plato, behold me transported to Athens, listening in the shade of a marble portico raised on elegant columns—to which the sun of Greece has given the polish and amber tint of ivory—to one of those inimitable conversations where Socrates, by the spell of his eloquence, strives to inspire his disciples with his own sublime and radiant wisdom. I recline at one of those banquets, where the grave philosopher disdains not to mingle with frivolous youth, well knowing that the charm of his voice will soon make the revellers forget their cups. I see Alcibiades himself, who entered just now with a supercilious smile on his lips, and his head crowned with violets, lend by degrees a more willing ear; at first attracted, then subjugated, he listens in silence. Shame, and soon respect, depict themselves on his now serious countenance, tears of enthusiasm glisten in his eyes, and, snatching off his crown of flowers, he places it on the

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brow of the master, whom he declares to be inspired by the gods!

Then Virgil takes possession of my thoughts, and conducts me through his magic landscapes; I wander with him on the lonely shore, where the stork pursues her staid and solitary course beneath a sky charged with storm-clouds; I penetrate some ancient forest, where the crowded oaks intermingle their dark shadows; I smell in the heavy air the dank and baneful odours of the marshes; I hear re-echoed beneath leafy domes the wild birds' shrill cry. Soon, however, brighter scenes invite and attract me; vast landscapes spread themselves out beneath the fruitful rays of the sun: here I behold yellow plains, where the ripe grain undulates with every breeze, there prairies with herds grazing beside the river as it flows between its low-lying banks; pale green willows and shrubs all glowing with their purple berries, separate the various orchards, where the husbandman is singing while he prunes his trees. The bees hum in the blue expanse; and, mingled with the lowing of cattle, I hear the champing of horses in their stables.

From the depths of nature, Plutarch wins me back to the ranks of humanity; guided by him, I pass in review, one after the other, the heroes whom he has assembled in his writings as in a glorious Pantheon; less ready, indeed, to linger near those famous conquerors who derived nearly all their prestige from the work-

ings of ambition and pride ; but delighted to attach myself to the plain citizens who, though of obscure birth, and uncertain of future fame, devoted their lives to the good of their country, and to the triumph of virtue. I love to follow across the steaming furrow, step by step, the humble plough with which hands so recently victorious do not disdain to be occupied ; I sit down at the domestic hearth, closed like a sanctuary against commotion without, and sacred to the household gods, where the Roman wife guards her virtues, where the child grows up between tenderness and discipline, where the energies of the soul are braced by labour and abstinence. Insipid, classical trivialities only ! exclaim those who listen but with the ear, who in words perceive only sounds ,and grow angry at unsensual monotony ; but endless subjects for thought, and sources of refined pleasure, to those who read with the soul, and who in the personages of history recognise men and cherish brothers.

The scene changes ; St. Augustin and “The Imitation of Christ” transport me into a new world, the sun of Athens and of Rome is eclipsed ; a mystic light, more brilliant and yet softer, spreads over the earth ; the Parthenon and the Capitol are lost in haze, and give place to the spires of monasteries and the towers of cathedrals. I love to take refuge, far from battle-fields and the clashing of swords and spears, under the domes of these peaceful retreats ; to listen to the despairing avowals, and groans of the

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human conscience suddenly aroused from its long sleep ; and at the same time to hear those sublime chants, those fervent hymns, which celebrate a hope and a joy hitherto unknown in this world. Marvellous power of mind ! From a corner of my chamber—from the arm-chair which I occupy—I can traverse the immense abysses of the past. I am present at the foundation of cities, the birth and growth of empires ; I accompany various races as they wander over the earth, establish themselves and found nations ; I take note of that perpetual movement of humanity, as it seeks its level on the globe which has been given to it for an inheritance. Or, fatigued with these generalities, I repose in the tent of the patriarch Abraham, or beneath the oak of St. Louis. From the tribune of Cicero I pass to the pulpit of Bossuet ; distances are nothing to me ; I traverse them by an instantaneous bound, whether those of space or time. From the east I hasten to the west, from the early days of the world I pass on to the hour which has just struck ; wherever an attractive spectacle summons me, I am there in spirit ; or a noble action or an elevated conversation invites me, I am present to applaud or take part. Magnificent empire of memory ! vast power and inexhaustible activity of thought ! . . . I cease to be troubled now at my solitude and forced inaction.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## ILLNESS.

**S**EPTEMBER 2nd. . . . Months seem to have passed, or rather an incalculable period of time, since I wrote the last few lines of my journal, and yet, on referring to the date, I find that it is less than three weeks ago that I fell ill; the uninterrupted repose in bed, the scarcely observed succession of day and night, the vacant hours, the complete breaking off of habits, so changes our ordinary ideas of duration, as to make us incapable of estimating the progress of time! To-day I am allowed for the first time to get up and take a few turns in my bedroom; the reins at my request are at length committed to my hands as to a dismounted horseman, proud and impatient to find himself once more in the saddle. I am eager for recovery, in order again to have the control of surrounding objects—again to become my own master.

I cannot recollect how the fall took place as the

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result of which I found myself lying in bed, surrounded by medicine-bottles, in the close atmosphere and semi-obscurity of a sick chamber. I am assured that a false step was the sole cause; but those in attendance repeat this to me with so much confidence, and appear so anxious for me to be convinced, that I cannot help distrusting their explanation; and a far more probable one is continually and forcibly presented to my mind. I suspect that I have been overtaken not by an accident having an external and fortuitous cause, but by the sudden attack of an internal disease. Many indications, which it is impossible for me to treat as imaginary—my sight suddenly become weak—an almost constant state of drowsiness and heaviness—the unconquerable languor with which my limbs obey my will—unite to confirm this idea, and announce the probable return, more or less remote, of a similar attack.

It is this last consideration, this looking forward to the future, which, during the past few days, has chiefly interrupted my repose; my thoughts have returned to it without intermission. While in that state peculiar to invalids, which is between sleep and the full possession of the faculties, my fancy exhausted itself in creating doleful images. Become at length better able to control my thoughts, I have succeeded little by little in arresting myself on this downward course, and in again recovering my liberty. As I have made a point all my life to resist the influence of credulity, that

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childish amulet relied on by the feeble, I must now take care to avoid distrust, which would not be the less superstition, or a less certain indication of weakness. Nothing is more pernicious, especially at my age, than that disposition to evoke threats, perhaps suppositional only, of the future; always to exaggerate beforehand the evils which Nature may have in store for us, and to ascribe to her those penalties which in reality are self-inflicted.

With regard to my present condition, is there anything which ought to surprise me? Since no period of life is exempt from disease, what right have I to reckon on an old age completely free from it? But it is not to reflection, it is not to the triumph of reason, that I am indebted for my acceptance of the state appointed for me. As I write this not for the public, but for myself and those dear to me, who will not suspect me of adopting an optimism to order, or of wishing to support a mere dogma; I do not hesitate to declare freely that it is my very state itself which induces me willingly to accept it, and that if I were to announce my resignation as the result of stoicism, I should lay claim to a merit to which I have no title.

I find, in reality, that disease has been calumniated. Unless it is accompanied by severe and constant suffering, which is rare, it has nothing about it so very formidable. It is from their mental torments that most sick persons suffer; instead of submitting to what

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they cannot avoid, they grow angry and revolt; instead of receiving with good grace the guest whom they cannot shut the door against, they prefer to avenge themselves for his presence, by making wry faces and loading him with recriminations. For my part, I am of opinion that peace may be found in illness. I do not blush to yield to an inscrutable necessity, to submit without resistance to a superior and unknown power. I accept everything as it comes with self-abandonment, and am not without the enjoyment of a certain repose of spirit in the midst of this bodily weakness. Moreover, I feel myself relieved from all responsibility of action with a perfectly satisfied conscience; and whenever my conscience is at ease, I can say with truth that I breathe freely, and enjoy in peace the consciousness of existence.

I am very far from desiring to vilify health; nevertheless, I will go so far as to assert that it does not merit all the pompous eulogiums which its votaries lavish upon it. Who will deny that health imposes duties, to which a sensitive conscience can with difficulty assign limits? Hence arise painful doubts and struggles which do not always end in victory. For my part, I do not know anything more overwhelming than those defeats which result in remorse. The body may, indeed, be vigorous, but it is the soul then which is sick.

There are other compensations more positive and incontestable in the eyes of the world, which are con-

nected with sickness. There are, for instance, the sympathy and the consideration which, independently of ourselves, it creates for us on every side. Men are so constituted that a something is necessary—an impulse from without, a shock to the feelings—in order that their kindness may be awakened and exercised ; we resemble those disciples of Christ who, when left to themselves in the garden of Gethsemane, always fell back into their drowsy state. Well, it is just so that illness, by exciting compassion, succeeds admirably in awaking our benevolence from its sleep. People love us when ill because they pity us ; we love them because we are beloved, and thus reciprocal affection is established, and an intimate communion between souls which, but for this agency of pity, might have remained strangers for ever. What pious philosopher was it who said “that the providence of God reckons for the accomplishment of its purposes on the charity of man”? I comprehend now for the first time the depth of this remark ; and since human charity does not originate of itself, I forgive and thank the apparent ills of life—and sickness in particular—which excite and develop it.

I met yesterday with a very interesting proof à propos to this subject. There is an old blind man who lives very near me, and with whom I have often exchanged a few kind words when passing him at his door. Surprised at no longer hearing the sound of my voice at the usual hour of my daily

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walk, and having discovered that I was ill, he came to see me yesterday. As his conversation indicated a serenity of soul, which contrasted in a striking manner with his mournful state, I could not help expressing to him my gratification and astonishment at it.

"Then I shall surprise you still more," replied he, "when I tell you that my cheerfulness dates from the accident which deprived me of sight. Before that period my disposition was the reverse of it. I passed with my neighbours, and I grant it was on good grounds, for a discontented and morose man. Having experienced considerable difficulties in making my way in the world, for which, no doubt, I have as much to thank myself as others, I became disgusted with the world, and accused mankind of being harsh and selfish; in short, I had turned quite a misanthrope. But since my loss of sight I have acquired far different ideas. My infirmity has reconciled me to my fellow-creatures. If you only knew how many proofs of interest, how many acts of kindness, are every day showered on me! It seems as if some benevolent power had posted friends and devoted attendants along my route, as in the fairy tales. When I am in the streets every one kindly gives place, for fear of embarrassing my progress; when I wish to cross a road traversed by carriages, I never fail to find an obliging hand laid upon mine to serve as guide; if I happen to stop with an appearance of hesitation or doubt, immediately some voice,

which always appears soft and musical to me, utters in my ear an inquiry as to what I am in need of, with an offer to become my conductor. Seeing myself respected and beloved, I love and respect others in my turn ; I am satisfied with the world and with myself. Hence I dare not complain of my blindness, whatever privations it may impose on me in other respects, since I owe to it what in reality constitutes happiness : good will towards men—a good disposition of heart.”

But I have no need to seek for examples of the beneficial effect of infirmities ; I have myself experienced the fact. The last few days only, have changed by relations with those about me to an extent that years, perhaps, might not have succeeded in effecting. Thus a tie of a totally new character has become established between Baptiste and myself. Hitherto he has served me with scrupulous punctuality, and I, on my side, have shown myself, as I believe, humane towards him ; I have treated him with uniform kindness, and when he was ill I desired that he should be properly cared for under my roof ; but that was all. Notwithstanding the exalted opinion that I entertained of my freedom from social prejudices, and of my feeling of perfect equality with regard to him, I had still a long way to travel before I could meet him fairly on the same level ; the difference of our intellectual culture created a barrier between us—a barrier which appeared to me legitimate

and necessary. When Baptiste was near me I did not feel the less alone ; his company was never an actual companionship to me; we were not united by bonds of sympathy, but only of contiguity. Now I can say truly that it is quite otherwise. Baptiste has had an opportunity to go beyond the exact fulfilment of duty, and to manifest his zeal ; to exceed obedience, and attain to devotion. He has not only waited on me, but he has rendered me service. There have been acts of attention and kind expressions on his part that no wages, no material remuneration, could recompense. I feel that I have contracted towards him a moral obligation, a debt of the heart, which the heart alone can repay.

So that although, from an external point of view, nothing seems changed between us, our relations from within are completely altered ; when he enters my room, it is something more than the movement which makes me turn my head, it is the arrival of some one to whom I feel the necessity of speaking and of giving proof of my sympathy. When our eyes meet, instead of exchanging the rapid glance of two passers-by, who have nothing to communicate to each other, we prolong our gaze, so as to convey signs of mutual recognition ; if our hands happen to touch, it is no longer an accidental contact which both hastily draw back from, for we both feel that if the occasion required it, that touch would become a grasp of affection.

I do not hesitate to say that even in the case of Roger, the nature of our intercourse has become more intimate and more sympathetic. Nothing new, doubtless, could arise between us ; but we now give full expression to what we suffered previously to lie concealed within our hearts. It had happened with us, as it generally happens with those who, from the necessity of their occupations, have given predominance to their intellectual life ; even during the hours of leisure and of liberty, which the heart ought jealously to claim for its own, they enter again upon the arena ; the mind resumes its habitual strain. One, for instance, describes the Chinese insurrection, gives his opinion on the probable issue of the contest, and the future destiny of the Celestial Empire ; the other responds by explaining some new electrical phenomena exhibited at the Academy of Science. And months and years of intimacy pass thus, yielding only idle gratification to curiosity, without any profit to the heart. Since my illness our friendship has assumed quite an altered character ; our meetings have for us an attraction which their very frequency augments rather than diminishes. The manner in which we occupy the evenings, when Roger comes regularly to sit by my side, I cannot precisely state ; but what I do know is, that they seem far from unprofitable to us both. Roger, in general so taken up with his philosophical pursuits, occupies himself entirely in divining my wants, in anticipating my desires, and

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his attentions fill me with gratitude. With what pleasure I accept from his hands the cup of medicine which he has kindly prepared himself, and thinks that I shall approve of ! Often he proposes to read aloud to me ; and I beg pardon of my favourite authors, but I suspect that the kindness of my dear reader, has more to do with the charm I find in their works than all their genius ; perhaps there is no author, however mediocre, with whom, under the circumstances, I should not be predisposed to feel more than satisfied. Even when we are silent, which happens occasionally, I can assert that we are not at all dull, for a mute conversation continues between us. In Roger's movements, in the noise he makes when drawing his arm-chair near the head of my bed, or in stirring the fire, in his very presence even, I feel the expression of his kindness and devotion. Hence we no longer need the interposition of chemistry or of history as a pretext for bringing us together ; what we wish to approximate, what we have in common, is not our science or our intellects, but ourselves ; and if pressed to explain why we love each other, we could only reply, with Montaigne, “ Raymond, because it is Roger ; Roger, because it is Raymond.”

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## MY TESTIMONY.

OCTOBER . . . . I have just passed through a singular phase of existence, and one which has not been without danger to my moral health. I have been trying to deceive others and myself; to encourage an illusion, the fallacy of which I was still aware of. Will it be credited? I have derived pleasure from regarding myself, and seeing myself regarded, as being indisposed only. Inasmuch as illness is an accident, a transitory condition of the body, a visitor who occasionally enters our homes, and not a fellow-lodger who lives with us; I liked to hear others talk to me about my attack, I suffered them to speak of my convalescence, I listened, without protesting, to the word, recovery. . . . At length I have shaken off, and thrust far from me, this temptation of a delusive egotism. No, I am not ill; the promises that have been made to me because I solicited them are

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so many flatteries; the potions I have to take are only relishes in disguise. What I suffer from is not illness, it is weakness, or, to speak plainly, the infirmity of age. My recent fall has brought me far onwards towards my journey's end. I have descended a hill which I shall never remount.

But what astonishes me is, that since I have fairly looked my position in the face, and announced it to others, I have been led to accept it without difficulty, and now find myself at ease; since I have refused to cling to the above illusion, and have set my foot on the firm ground of reality, I have regained repose and happiness. Nature appears to be jealous of our confidence; she waits for us to abandon ourselves to her, before receiving us cordially, and displaying the resources which she keeps in reserve for our benefit.

“We can accommodate ourselves to everything,” says popular wisdom; but underneath this truth there are many mysteries that we cannot fathom, many mercies which we ought to be grateful for; where we perceive only resignation, springing, as it were, from habit, for which we are apt to thank either fate or ourselves, there is a special design and interposition of Providence.

I can recollect having formerly broken more than one lance, in honour of the period of life at which I have now arrived; one which is certainly the most decried of all. I undertook its defence relying upon reason, and also impelled by a sort of instinctive faith.

It seemed to me that no time of life, no moment of existence, could be absolutely wanting in significance or in utility, and consequently be deprived of all happiness. But objections were made on account of my inexperience, the generous illusions of youth, the vanity of theories which succumb before reality; and an imposing array of examples was forced upon my attention, which were, I confess, well selected to disconcert me, and gave me, in truth, no little trouble. Now, people will not challenge my fitness to decide the question; the white hairs which I see reflected before me in the looking-glass, are incontestable titles to experience and maturity of judgment on this point; my opinion is something more than an opinion, it is a testimony. I have reached that very period of decline so shuddered at; I have descended to the bottom of that very abyss which men paint in such sombre colours; and none can contest my right to exclaim to the affrighted ones, who scan from a distance its repulsive depths: reassure yourselves, approach without fear; the situation is not so dreadful as you imagine; there is air here, and daylight; I can see clearly, and breathe without restraint!

Not that I mean to ignore the privations which old age inflicts, or refuse to acknowledge the losses one must submit to. If they are apparent to those who look on, how much more so to me who experience them. Yes, our strength is taken from us:

how can I help assenting to this—I, who require the assistance of Baptiste every morning to enable me to accomplish a few turns in my bed-chamber? Our senses grow dull, and betray us: granted, I cannot argue to the contrary, when only yesterday, after trying all the pairs of spectacles scattered about my drawers, I was forced to get Roger to read my daughter's letter to me; not without blaming the pointed style of writing I used so much to admire. And further, I will not even dispute what most shocks and revolts people, and causes old age to be so dreaded: viz., the weakening of the mental faculties. I acknowledge that the memory does become confused and impaired. I have made the observation both for and upon myself; and if it is asserted that the intellect fails also, I am ready to submit equally on this point; were I to feel conscious of any difficulty in subscribing to it, I should be the first to tax myself with vanity. . . . Here then, indeed, are extensive ruins; but I regard them with a tranquil eye, for in the midst of these ruins something remains perfect still; amid this decay, something still survives; and that something is the conscience, the soul; the very man himself. So far from all being lost, I maintain that all is saved!

At present, I neither feel called on to adopt a tone of humiliation, nor will I suffer old age to be depreciated; were I as borne down with years, as reduced, and as infirm as the detractors of old age are pleased

to represent it, I assert that I should nevertheless feel myself as completely in possession of our common human nature, and as capable of dignity and of happiness, as the most richly endowed with bodily and mental advantages. But why not make a full revelation of my thoughts? It is not my wish to put the young out of conceit of their youth, and the strong of their strength, or to give the talented a distaste for their mental powers. I should be wrong were I to attempt it, and, after all, should fail in the endeavour. My conviction, however, is, that I have nothing to regret in losing those external adornments, which attract our dazzled eyes to the surface only, not to the deeper life within; and that so far from being disinherited of life, I exist under happier conditions than before. With the recollection of the deceptive chimeras, which the consciousness of my powers formerly led me to entertain; of the foolish ambition, that enemy of peace and truth, with which my tolerably good or, rather, self-satisfied abilities filled my proud spirit—why should I complain now of possessing only the means to estimate and love what is really good? Convinced that the life of the soul is the only real life, the joy of the soul the only real joy; why should I not congratulate myself at being delivered from all the rest, and, as it were, reduced to soul only? I protest against the comparison we are accustomed to hear, made between life and a mountain, the summit of which is hardly reached before we have

to commence the descent on the other side ; despairing comparison which cannot leave a single tranquil moment to those who repeat it—that is, if they accept it as true. No ; life resembles rather Jacob's ladder, which starts from the earth to descend no more ; each round in advance commands the lower one, each step elevates ; we mount, and mount on, and mount for ever.

There are, however—it is impossible to deny it—many old persons whose appearance, far from offering encouragement, inspires us only with pity and sorrow. Their despairing lamentations prove to us, but too surely, the wretched climax to which they have attained. But I affirm that, in such cases, it is not old age itself that should receive the blame, but youth and middle age. When the autumn is barren, it is the fault of the previous spring and summer. How should those who have crushed out, or suffered to languish within them, what alone can prove fruitful and durable even beyond the grave, avoid finding themselves poor and desolate, when they come to part with endowments which were only given them for a season, and were subject to decay and destruction ? . . . . Eager to turn the passing hour to account, believing only in the reality of things visible and palpable to the senses, they have cultivated none but the lower and transitory faculties, which are the instruments of the soul, as the muscles are the instruments of the body ; and have left the soul itself, the flame of life,

the very breath of God, to perish of languor and inanition. But you, my brothers, who have paid due regard to the dignity of your nature, for whom the words Justice and Duty have not been vain sounds, who have set the joys that spring from a good conscience above sensual pleasure, you may enter the portals of old age without dismay. Grant even that your intellect will then no longer grasp ideas with the same force and acumen, that your memory will lose the tender recollections which used to spring up at the faintest summons, you will not the less retain your inner life intact and vigorous in the centre of your being. In proportion as your external communications diminish, and you make less stir and less noise, the world, which perceives only the surface of things, will declare that extinction is gaining upon you; but you will know how completely the world is deceived. If your eyes are closed to the light without, a purer ray will shine from within, never to be extinguished. If external sounds no longer excite your attention, you will possess within yourself a living voice, a joyful communion, which will never grow silent. And thus at the very moment when perhaps the world will commiserate you; far from envying others or regretting the past, you will thank old age, and give it this favourable testimony, that never have you enjoyed a peace so pure, or experienced a serenity so profound and assured.

## CHAPTER XL.

## LAST THOUGHTS.

**N**OVEMBER . . . . I feel that it is time to conclude this journal ; my eyes and my fingers both refuse their office, and compel me to grant them a final discharge from active duty ; besides, my history—and not only that of my actions, but also that of my inner life—is finished. My mind has at length cast anchor on one single thought, alike unchangeable and inexhaustible, which gives me the impression of a vast ocean always the same, and yet always new, through its immensity and the never-ceasing motion of its waves.

The thought I allude to is that of death ; and it has become my constant companion. I rarely fall asleep at night without its hovering over my pillow, or re-open my eyes in the morning without its presenting itself to my mind. Not a day passes that it

does not come upon me quite suddenly in the midst of some occupation which seemed not necessarily to suggest it. Everything which I behold drawing to a close—the sun as it sets, the day on its decline, my fire as it burns low; each recalls this thought very quickly to my mind, if it happens to escape me too long.

But I do not try to avoid it. Even before having seriously thought of death, I never cherished the desire to retard, any more than to hasten its approach by a single day. From natural disposition as much as from principle, I have always sought to regulate my desires in accordance with the progress of my career, and to conform my will in the best possible way to that sovereign Providence which rules over all things, and whose laws I accept with the thorough conviction of their wisdom and goodness. I have found in this habit—or, to speak more modestly and more correctly, in this tendency—an excellent guide, which has led me as by the hand in critical moments, and proved a strong support when the path of life has been beset with difficulties; and moreover has doubtless saved me from many a struggle, that would have proved as useless as exhausting. At the present moment it is not alone to my long-adopted habit of peaceful resignation, that I owe the absence of any fear of Death. I have to a certain extent made his acquaintance, and without as yet being on such terms of familiarity as to consider him an intimate friend,

whom I would invite with all my heart, I am convinced he wishes me no ill. If I rush not forward to his encounter, at least I advance towards him without suspicion, and I can add even with a secret hope.

Poor death! how ungrateful the mission he is charged with, and what trouble he has to make his true character understood amongst men! Granted that, at the first blush, the apparent destruction of which death is presented to us as the implacable agent, clothes him with a formidable character; but a more careful scrutiny enables us to pierce through this terrible veil, and reassures us by revealing his true nature. Death may be compared to those sombre alchemists of the middle ages, whom the people suspected guilty of sacrilegious murders, but who in reality were only the servants of science and worshippers of the Divine laws.

No! death's mission is not to destroy; the word annihilation, which is used to explain it, and indeed is sometimes made its synonym, is one of those injurious nicknames which the vulgar, as if out of revenge, apply to unknown characters who impose on them. It is sufficient for me to analyse death attentively to become convinced of this. I need only a little clairvoyance to discern that, instead of being a blind and cruel event, the sadness of which not the tears of the whole world could efface, death is a miracle of foresight, an inexhaustible source of fecundity. It gives me intense pleasure to direct my thoughts into this channel, even though I cannot

pursue it to its furthest limits. Take any existing object whatever, the first that offers, a blade of grass, or the insect that crawls at our feet, and follow its history; observe at the mysterious signal of the invisible Master, the elements which composed it, not destroyed, but transformed; not disappear, but set free to travel elsewhere, one a couple of feet perhaps, another thousands of miles to accomplish some new purpose; each of them conveyed on the wings of the wind—by a drop of dew—or on the waves of the ocean—to reach the spot assigned to it, fix itself only again to start forth, start forth only again to become fixed; never to sink into the cold embrace of death, without there recovering its energy, and passing thence, under innumerable forms, through every ripple of the mighty current in which the whole universe revolves. No, there is no destruction, but everywhere metamorphosis; no end which is not a beginning. Nothing is lost, nothing is cursed; everything which falls, falls into the arms of an invisible angel, who gathers it up and bears it away to some higher destination.

I cannot, therefore, feel any disquietude respecting the future of my corporeal part; I know that everything which enters into its composition, down to the minutest atom, is confined for ever to this admirable and fruitful creation wherein it will always have its part to play. The human race, the forests, the cattle, the rivulets of the valley, the mountain snows, will

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never cease to claim its elements. It will always have its place secured at the eternal feast of life, its voice to raise in the universal concert.

Tranquil as to the destiny of my body ; of that portion of my being, the sacrifice of which, however, I could make without repugnance, how shall I be otherwise than tranquil as to the destiny of my soul ? Here I admit that nature furnishes me with no tangible proofs—that the history of souls is not written in characters visible to human eyes ; but, nevertheless, I feel no regret on that account. I even willingly pass over the ingenious arguments of the most enlightened philosophy, for I believe in the immortality of the soul from my own interior consciousness : that science, perfect in itself, which waits not for the results of logicians to proclaim its convictions. I have an intuitive faith that the magnificent, the divine gift I have received of being able to say “I,” of being self-conscious, of living and realising my life, of co-operating with it through the joyful consent of my volition, will not be taken from me. True, I know no more ; but is not this enough ? Is it not all ? To die is, then, in reality, nothing more than to go forth and change my country. Oh ! what a journey, and what a destination ! To traverse with the retention of self-consciousness the immeasurable space of the universe ! To revolve in the torrent of life, in order to become a new creature ! To go with the consent of a freely submitting will and cast myself, as intelligent

matter, into the hands of the Divine Potter! At this prospect an indescribable feeling takes possession of me: a solemn expectation, as it were, mingled with transports of joy. I am like a traveller about to embark for the East: he loves his native shore, still pressed by his feet; but he loves, nevertheless, in advance the beautiful land whose splendours his fancy portrays. Filled with tender sadness, but also with hope, he keeps his eyes fixed on the immense ocean which spreads itself out before him, and almost laves his feet on the shore, as if to become familiar and invite him to its bosom. . . . .

But how does it happen that, with the increasing serenity with which I contemplate death, I should still be subject at certain moments to such distressing impressions? Last night, in particular, I was unable to sleep, and insurmountable apprehensions seized my heart. I realised with a feeling of bitterness, I may say almost of terror, the loneliness of my last hour. I should have at the supreme moment of departure to rely only on myself, hear only my own breathing, amidst a frozen silence; I should not have to console and strengthen me the tears of affection and the farewells of my children!

These painful impressions, however, were soon dissipated with the obscurity of night, and gave place to better and juster sentiments. Far from giving my heart any credit for a sensibility of which I alone was the object, it became evident to me that I had

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only been the victim of certain morbid impressions which spring from our weakness ; and had yielded to that necessity of self-commiseration—of weeping over ourselves—to which the malignant susceptibility of our selfishness subjects us.

Yes, things are better as they are ; and were it allowable even to change them, I think I should abstain from so doing.

I have never liked at the moment of starting on a journey to be surrounded by my relatives and friends. The hour of separation, with its anxious waiting, its repressed tears, its half-uttered sighs, not only gives occasion to the legitimate sorrow of parting, but it oppresses, it suffocates, it tears the very heart's fibres. How much more certain is death, with its mournful concomitants, to overwhelm us ! Like those fairies of the legend, who veiled their youth and beauty beneath repulsive rags, death turns towards Heaven its radiant face, and exhibits to the eyes of men its sinister terrors only. It would almost seem as if death feared to be understood, and desired, while destroying the flesh, to triumph over the spirit. It does not touch, but strikes us down ; it does not soften, but breaks us in pieces ! Death succeeds so well in inspiring terror, that not only does it banish from its immediate presence all serenity in the survivors, but leaves in its train a long-felt horror ; and so disturbs for a great while, perhaps for ever, the pure melancholy of our recollections.

The more I think of this, the more satisfied I am to spare my children from so mournful a trial. Doubtless I do not wish to be forgotten by them, but their affection for me is a sure guarantee of their sorrow ; I am not anxious to wound their hearts, in order to engrave a souvenir there in bleeding lines. Let them remain far, far, from me ! They will learn that I have gone contented to a better country, without assisting at the painful disorder of my departure. Their grief will have nothing violent or bitter in it. They will not experience those sobs which overwhelm, those convulsive emotions which almost break the heart ; if they weep, they will shed peaceful and gentle tears, which soften and purify the soul. Their mourning habits will not be for them girdles of torture ; they will wear them rather as proofs of fidelity, and as the symbols of a religious hope !

And I, for my part, am no longer tempted to regret my isolation ; I thank, on the contrary, that Providence which arranges for me a tête-à-tête with death, instead of a meeting in public. A feeling akin to shame comes over me, while anticipating the state to which death will doubtless reduce me, if but for a moment ; and it is a satisfaction to me to think that that shame will not be violated. As I alone shall experience my firm assurance, it is just that I also should be the sole witness of my momentary confusion. Is this pride ? My conscience replies no ; it is rather the dignity of human nature

that I feel called on to defend in my own person. Far from setting myself in opposition to nature, I do no more than yield to the impulse she hersclf inspires. There are times when she does not like to be taken by surprise; there are secrets she will keep to herself, and it is on this account that she surrounds them with what is mournful. All creatures, even the humblest, appear to understand her wish, and to conform to it. When the hour of death is come, the roebuck betakes himself to the remotest part of the forest, the sparrow hides away in the thickest tuft of foliage, the insect encloses itself in its impenetrable cocoon of silk, there to bury the mystery of its metamorphosis. . . . .

*November 15th.*—I have just read over the last entries of my diary, and feel very happy at having been able to write them. It appears to me that they describe with sufficient exactness all that passes within me; that they convey, indeed, a faithful reflection of my inner life. I declare with pleasure that there is not one of my feelings at all permanent, or one of my thoughts—that is to say, of my serious and persistent thoughts—which I cannot find portrayed in some one or other of these pages. It would cause a smile were I to allow myself to depict the joy, not unmixed with pride, which I feel at seeing my task thus completed, at the very moment when my strength, constantly on the decrease, was about to compel me inexorably to abandon it.

Bitter ennui, distaste of life, regrets for the past, dislike of the present, dread of the future—sombre phantoms of which old age, according to the world's dictum, is the mournful abode—where are you? I have entered the portals of old age, and have not discovered you. Together with fatigue and weakness, I have met with indulgence of conscience; the sweetness of merited repose; and occupations which are pleasures. I have found enforced loneliness accompanied by the consolations of memory and reflection, and of a more intimate communion with my own soul; in the midst of sickness even, and infirmity, compensations which have made them as dear to me as health; lastly, on the threshold of death, the hope of immortality.

It is true that fate has not shown itself very severe in my case; I should be ungrateful indeed if I did not reckon myself among the number of the privileged; nevertheless, I am convinced that the most precious of privileges are within the reach of every one, and that they are the fruits of humility and an honest heart.

May this, my testimony, prove useful to my friends and to my children, who will peruse these pages! To my children especially! May it assist them to rise superior to themselves in the hour of disappointment and of doubt, to march onwards through life with unshaken courage, to realise the existence of a paternal Providence, which always accom-

modates our burdens to our powers ; which never suffers our road to be without refreshing shade and sparkling fountains ; and wants neither the power nor the goodness to justify our hopes, however sublime in themselves ! With what joy shall I depart if permitted to think at my last hour that, though long separated from my children by the force of circumstances, and though reduced by age to the very last stage of weakness, I have not failed in the latest duties I owed them ; if I can feel assured that, though removed by death, I shall still continue to educate them for life, and elevate them—that is to say, bear them in my heart—above the blinding dust and the storms below, up into the pure region of duty and of true happiness ! . . . .

THE END.







